

Tears & Tributes



By

"ZAKIR"

PART 2

VIII

The Night of Tragedy

A thick pall of dust was hanging over the battlefield of Karabala as the sun was setting. The events of that day, the carnage and massacre of saintly souls had cast a gloom on that desert tract. An eerie silence was prevailing which was from time to time broken by the sound of drum-beating to celebrate the victory—the hollow victory achieved by a host of well-fed, well-equipped soldiers against a handful of brave warriors, tormented by three days of thirst and hunger, each of whom had fought every inch of his ground and displayed valiance which has remained unparalleled in the annals of mankind.

When the beating of drums had stopped, the desert wind carried the sound of wailing from tents pitched on a hillock, tents which had been plundered and burnt, tents which had been ransacked, looted and pillaged. These ramshackle tents were the remains of Husain's Camp. The moaning sound that was coming from them was of the ladies and children of the Prophet's house who had suffered untold hardships and indignities at the hands of Yazid's mercenary minions. Not long after the ruthless killing of Husain, Yazid's soldiers had marched on the camp where the defenceless ladies and helpless children of Husain and his devoted followers stayed and, with ruthlessness and savagery which only these barbarians were capable of, had robbed them even of wearing apparel. There was not much that they could lay their hands on. The son of Ali and Fatima was not accustomed to worldly luxuries and what they found in his camp sorely disappointed them. The coarse clothes they could get had only immense sentimental value for the ladies and children who were deprived of them, because many of them had been woven by Fatima with her own hands. The small wooden cradle which they took away had inestimable value for Ali Asghar's mother, because it had associations with that child who had died a little while ago in his father's arms, with his throat pierced by the arrow of Hurmula.

The widows and orphans who had, during the short space of a few hours, lost all their dear ones were brutally beaten and lashed by the

ruthless marauders. Not satisfied with their heartless brutality, the enemy set fire to the tents. What a holocaust it was! A young child was seen rushing out of one of the burning tents with his clothes aflame. One of the enemy soldiers, seeing his pitiable condition, came to his help and put out the flames. The child looked at him with surprise because he had not expected to find even a spark of human feelings in the brutes who had come to inflict tortures on them. Seeing that he was somewhat different from the others, he sobbed: "O Shaikh, when you have been so kind to me, do me one more favour and show me the way to Najaf." The man was very much surprised at this request. He replied "Najaf is far away from here; in fact it is several leagues from here. But tell me, why you want to know the way to Najaf." The child innocently replied: "I want to go to the tomb of my grandfather Ali in Najaf and tell him what your people have done to us—how our men have been butchered; how our ladies have been whipped. I want to tell him how the earrings were snatched away from the ears of Sakina, my cousin, and how she was left bleeding and in pain."

Zainab, who was now in charge of the camp, according to the last wishes of her beloved brother, did not know what to do. Should she ask all the ladies and children to perish in the consuming fire rather than suffer the indignities they were subjected to? Whose counsel and advice she could take in this hour of trial, for, Ali, the ailing son of Husain, was lying unconscious on the bare floor of one of the burning tents? Even the mat on which this young Imam was lying had been snatched away. Zainab had no alternative but to turn to Ali Zainal Abedeen who, though seriously ill, was the only person whose decision in such a crucial matter had to be followed. She rushed to him and shook him hard saying: "O my brother's son, as our Imam I appeal to you to tell us what we should do in the present trying circumstances. Shall we remain in the tents and allow ourselves to be devoured by the fires that are raging or go out of the tents into the open?" He opened his eyes burning with fever. With effort he rose and replied to Zainab, "My aunt, it is our religious duty to do all we can to save our lives. We must all leave the tents and go out into the open, however unpalatable it may be to us." On hearing this Zainab and Kuslum led all the ladies and children out of the burning tents. She helped Ali Zainal Abedeen to go out into the open.

Soon the fires raging in the tents subsided. Only one tent remained though partly damaged by the fire. The ladies and children salvaged whatever they could of their meagre belongings and huddled together in the remnants of that one tent which afforded them some shelter.

With the advent of the night the moon appeared on the horizon. It appeared tinted with red. Whether it was due to the effect of the dust that was hanging heavily in the atmosphere or whether the silver orb was red with anger at the atrocities that were perpetrated on the innocent people of the Prophet's house, it is difficult to say. The thirsty children who were still without water, were going out of the tents to open their mouths in vain attempts to catch the dew that was falling in tiny drops. But such was the heat radiated by the sand that even the dew drops were evaporating in the atmosphere.

The base and despicable instincts of Amr Saad and his subordinate officers were not gratified even with the inhuman tortures they had inflicted on the widows and orphans in Husain's camp. They were assembled to consider how they could further satisfy their thirst for revenge. Someone from them suggested that the bodies of the martyrs from Husain's camp may be trampled under the hoofs of horses after they had given a burial to their own dead soldiers. This suggestion led some persons from the tribe of Bani Asad to get up and protest that they would not permit the body of any of Husain's followers from their tribe to be defiled in this manner. Others got up and similarly objected to such treatment being meted out to the corpses of Husain's companions belonging to their clan or tribe or in any way related to them. Amr Saad seeing the opposition decided that only the body of Husain may be trampled under the feet of horses. For this purpose horses were shod afresh and the brutes carried out their purpose. There was not a soul amongst them to say that, though Husain was not related to him, he was the Prophet's grandson and his blood relationship with the Prophet deserved better consideration, if not in life, at least in death. Not one amongst them had the decency to say that the Prophet of Islam had expressly enjoined on them not to desecrate or defile even the corpses of the fallen foes who had died in battle against the Prophet. When Zainab and Kulsum, the loving sister of Husain came to know that only Husain's body was singled out for this barbarous

defilement, their grief and sorrow knew no bounds. But what could they do in their utterly helpless predicament?

The night was progressing slowly, as if time had come to a standstill. Though tired, exhausted and fagged out, Zainab realised that she had to perform the duties which now had devolved on her because the illness of Ali Zainal Abedeen, the only surviving son of Husain, had become aggravated by what he had endured. She called her sister Umme Kulsum to her and told her that they had now to look after the orphaned children, according to Husain's last wishes, in the best manner they could. They both decided that they would first count all the children to see that none of them was lost in the wilderness during the pandemonium that had prevailed as a result of the arson, and after that, they both would, by turn, keep vigil outside the tent.

Zainab called all the children to her and started counting and identifying each of them. They found that one child was missing. To her horror and dismay, Zainab found that Sakina, the beloved daughter of Husain, whom he had particularly requested her to look after, before marching out for the last time, was not there. In the dark night, dimly lit by the pale moon, Zainab and Kulsum started the search. In vain they were looking hither and thither but no trace of Sakina was found. With every minute of her vain search for Sakina, Zainab's anxiety was increasing. She knew not where to look for her. She was shouting: "O Sakina, my darling, tell me where are you? Where shall I look for you in this limitless desert?" The echo of her voice was the only reply she was getting. In utter frustration she turned to the place where the body of Husain lay. Running towards Husain's body she cried: "Husain, my brother, I cannot find Sakina, your own darling child, whom you had left to my care. Tell me, brother, where shall I look for her in this wilderness." As she came near the body, the moon, which had been hiding behind dark clouds came out and lit the surrounding area with its pale beams. She saw Sakina clinging to the dead body of her father and sleeping with her head rested on his chest. For a moment Zainab thought that the child had passed away, being unable to bear the torments she was subjected to since her father's martyrdom. Slowly she came near the child and gently cried: "Sakina, my child, I have come here after searching for you all over this desert." The girl opened her eyes. Even in

that dimly lit desert Zainab could see that Sakina's eyes were swollen as if she had cried her heart out embracing the body of her beloved father. She gently picked her up in her arms and said, "Sakina, tell me what made you come here. My child, how could you find your father's beheaded body in this dark night." Innocently the child replied, "O aunt, I was seized by an irresistible desire to tell my father what these people had done to me. I wanted to tell him that his dear Sakina had been robbed of the earrings which he had so lovingly presented. I wanted to tell him that the man had not even cared to take them out but snatched them away, tearing my ear-loops. I wanted to tell him that when I had cried with pain, I had been mercilessly slapped by that beast." The child continued sobbing: "When I left the tent I was running aimlessly in the desert shouting, 'Father, tell me where you are lying. Father, Sakina wants to come to you and tell you about all the sufferings she has endured since you left her! I felt that the wind brought a moaning cry from this direction, as if my father was replying to me: 'Sakina, my own Sakina, come here, come here.' I came running in this direction and I found my father lying here. Zainab, my aunt, I narrated to him all that I had endured; all that you and everybody else had suffered since our parting with him. My narrating everything to him lightened my heart and I felt an urge to sleep on his chest, for the last time, as I had been sleeping so often when he was alive. So I kept my head on his chest and slept till you came to awaken me"

With Sakina in her hands, Zainab returned to the camp. Much as she had felt like remaining there near Husain's body and pouring her full heart before him, as Sakina had done, she could not do so because she was conscious that her sister Umme Kulsum and Sakina's mother were waiting for her and Sakina, with fear and hope. She hurried back to the camp as fast as her tired legs could carry her. On reaching the tent, she put the exhausted child in the mother's arms with a request to put her to sleep. For Zainab there were other duties to perform and to keep a vigil outside. It was not so much a thought of protecting any precious belongings, for, of these there were none; it was with the intention of requesting any possible intruders not to disturb the children, the hungry and thirsty children who were one by one falling into sleep of sheer exhaustion.

She had hardly come out of the tent when she noticed that a group of people were advancing towards the burnt out camp. Their figures were silhouetted by the flame-torches they carried. Zainab was beside herself with rage at the callousness of these intruders who, she thought, would not even permit the children the little rest which sleep afforded them. She hurried towards these persons and, when she was within hearing distance from them, entreated them to go back. "If you have come with the object of looting us," she said, "I can tell you that your people have not left with us any thing of value. Our children have gone to sleep and your vandalism will awaken them. If at all you want anything, come in the morning. We helpless women and children cannot escape from your clutches during the night".

A lady, who was accompanying the batch, replied to her in a very polite tone. Zainab was surprised at the respectful tone in which that lady was addressing her: "My lady, we have not come to take away anything from you, for we know that what you have said is true and there is nothing left with you. We have brought some food and water for your children and the bereaved ladies of your camp."

Nothing could have surprised Zainab more than this reply. The people from Yazid's army, and the lady accompanying them, had now reached Zainab's tent. She could see in the flickering light of the torches they were carrying, that what the lady had said was correct. Some of the men were carrying, on their heads large trays containing bread; others had in their hands pitchers full of water. What emotions this sight of water evoked in Zainab's wounded heart! Can be better imagined than described. For this water each and every one of her kith and kin, her sons, her nephews, her brothers and Husain had craved till death, but not a drop was given to any of them. She controlled herself and took the lady into the tent.

Try as she would, Zainab could not recognise this lady who was the only one from the enemy's side to have spoken so kindly and respectfully to her since that evening. So she asked her who she was and what had induced her people to relent by sending food and water. The lady replied: "My lady, I am the widow of Hur, who last night came over to your brother Husain from Yazid's army and died this morning fighting bravely in defence of your brother. My husband was a general in Yazid's army, commanding a thousand soldiers. When some of the soldiers of Amr Saad realised that all of you would perish due to hunger and thirst, and they would not be able to take you before Yazid according to his command, they decided to depute me to carry the food and water for you."

As soon as Zainab heard that her visitor was the widow of that brave warrior who had turned his back on the world with disdain to defend her brother Husain, and laid down his life fighting most gallantly, she offered her condolences to the widow. "O sister," she said, "we are all indebted to your husband for laying down his precious life in defending Husain. He was our guest, but alas! he came to us at a time when we had nothing left to offer him. May God grant you patience to endure your bereavement." Hearing this, Hur's widow replied: "My lady, I know not how I can offer my condolences to you, for you have lost, not one, but 18 members of your family." She brought the trays of bread and water-jugs and placed them before Zainab.

Zainab was reminded of the parting wish of her brother. Just before leaving, he had told her that, if she got water after his death, she should first offer it to Sakina. With a tumbler full of water she went over to where Sakina was sleeping and woke her up saying: "Sakina, my child at last there is water for you. Get up, my child, and wet your parched lips and throat with this refreshing drink."

Sakina got up from her sleep and looked at her aunt. With child-like innocence she asked: "Dear Aunt, you too have remained thirsty for days. Why did you not drink it first before waking me up." Zainab replied with a lump in her throat: "My child, it is usual to give food and drink to the youngest first. Since you are the youngest here, I have brought it to you." Hearing this, Sakina took the mug filled with water from Zainab's hands and ran out of the tent. Zainab rushed out after her shouting: "Sakina, tell me where you want to go in this dark outside." The child replied: "I am taking the water to my brother Ali Asghar, who is sleeping amongst the dead. Did you not tell me that it is usual to offer such things to the youngest? Ali Asghar is the youngest amongst us. I know he did not get a drop of water, for, when Father brought his still body, soaked in blood, from the battlefield, my mother had anxiously asked him whether any of the soldiers of Amr Saad had taken pity on his condition and given him water. Father could not say yes in reply to this question; he could only hang his head down with tears rolling down his cheeks. My mother and I understood that Ali Asghar had died thirsty. I cannot forget how my young brother was turning his dried tongue on his parched lips since this morning. O' Aunt Zainab, now that water is available, let me give it to him."

This innocent reply of Sakina brought before the eyes of everybody the scene of that morning, with the child Ali Asghar's tragic quest for water. All of them wept bitterly recalling the memory of that infant who had perished with parched lips. Controlling herself Zainab caught hold of Sakina and said: "Sakina, Ali Asghar has been given water in heaven by your Grandfather and he is no longer thirsty. Let him sleep the eternal sleep of death from which nothing can wake him up. See, your father, your uncle Abbas and your brother Ali Akbar, have not tasted the water from the cool springs of heaven because they would not touch it so long as you, my child, remain thirsty. Drink it, my child, drink it so that those who are waiting in Heaven for you to quench your thirst, may also taste the water of Kausar." Sakina silently took the tumbler from Zainab's hands and drank the water with hot tears rolling down her cheeks. Was she recalling how her uncle Abbas had gone out to fetch water for her, this same water which was now available to her to drink as much as she wanted, never to return?

All the children were served food and water after waking them up from their tired sleep. Can it be imagined how the ladies of the house of the Prophet partook of the food and water with the memory of their dear ones, dying without any food or water, still lingering in their minds and eating up their hearts like cankers? The children were put to sleep again. Zainab asked all the ladies to sleep and undertook to keep a watch outside so that, if any intruders came, she could warn them. In spite of the protestations of the other ladies, Zainab would not agree to sleep and let them keep the watch. "It was my brother's wish that, after him, I should assume all the responsibilities of this caravan of captives. I must fulfil the responsibilities that have now devolved on me according to his wishes" she said with a tone of finality.

Zainab was now taking rounds of the tent with a half burnt tent-pole in her hands. She was sometimes looking towards the morgue where lay the corpses of all her dear ones, Ali Akbar, Qasim, Aun and Muhammad, and others. Sometimes she was looking in the direction of the river where lay the body of her brother Abbas. Often she was looking in the direction where lay the body of her dearest Husain. She was recalling how her brothers, nephews and sons had tenderly looked after her from the day

she had started from Medina on the ominous journey and what a helpless and hapless state she was finding herself in, when they were all gone for ever. With these thoughts she turned in the direction of Najaf where her father Ali lay buried. To her mind came the memories of the days spent by her in Kufa when her father, as the Khalif, was having his seat in that town. With what respect she was treated in those days by these very people who had not in the least hesitated to hurl insults and ignominy at her on this day! How they had vied with each other in attempts to humiliate her? Her head was reeling with these thoughts. She swooned with the grief which had become unbearable for her. In her unconscious state she saw one person galloping towards the camp as if he was coming from a long distance and wanted to reach there post-haste. His face was covered by a veil. In her sub-conscious state she felt that he was coming to torment the widows and children and so she shouted at him to halt. In her feverish delirium she entreated him not to disturb the ladies and children who were sleeping. She felt that her requests were not heeded by the rider. Burning with wrath she rushed towards the rider, caught hold of his reins and shouted at him: "O Shaikh, I am supplicating you to turn back and not to disturb us in our present predicament, but you are not listening to me. I am the grand-daughter of the Prophet of Islam and daughter of Ali and Fatima. Have you no regard for the Prophet and his family that you are treating my earnest requests with such scant respect?" In her unconscious state she saw the person on horseback lift the veil from his face. She saw the face of her father Ali, with deep sorrow depicted on it. She heard him burst out into tears and say: "Zainab, I have come to take over from you the duty of guarding the widows and children of my Husain, his kinsmen and companions. O Zainab! what have these forces of evil and oppression done to you all." Zainab felt as if she must unburden her heart to her father. "O Father, how late you have come! Where were you when my Ali Akbar and Qasim, Abbas and others fell in the battlefield? Where were you when your Husain's head was mercilessly severed from his body without giving him a drop of water? Where were you when Ali Asghar's throat was pierced with an arrow? Where were you when Sakina's earrings were snatched away mercilessly and when she was brutally slapped by Shimr? Where were you when Yazid's soldiers snatched away our veils and set fire to our tents?" These outpourings of her heart were shaking her body in

convulsions. She regained consciousness to find that she was there alone lying on the desert sand with her clothes wet with the tears flowing from her eyes. The dawn was breaking at that time. She recalled with pain the events of the previous day—how at this time Ali Akbar had given the call for prayers and how the morning prayers were offered in congregation by Husain and his devoted followers! She shook off her tears, did substituted ablution on the sand and began her morning prayers. Her morning prayers finished, she laid down her head in prostration and prayed: "O Allah, give me strength to bear the woes that I have to face. Give me courage to carry on the mission which I have to fulfil. Give me fortitude and patience to bear the insults, ignominies and indignities which are to be inflicted on me—O Thou Who art the Source of all Power and Strength."

The Captives' Caravan

WHEN the sun rose on the morning of the 11th of Muharram, it was dark-red in colour with the dust particles, which were heavily laden in the air. This dark colour indicated as if it had become red with shame at the sight it had beheld the previous day and the sight it expected to behold that morning. It was coming out slowly, as if reluctant to cast its rays on the ghastly scene. It saw a very strange and unusual sight, with ladies and children huddled together outside the shambled remains of burnt tents. With no shelter over their heads, the children were sleeping or rather lying semi-conscious with exhaustion, and the ladies were surrounding them as if they were expectantly awaiting some untoward events to occur. A state of uncertainty was writ large on their faces.

On the other side of this camp, the army was making preparations hurriedly for their departure. Amr Saad had called his officers for consultations with them as to what next step they should take. As a result of these consultations, it was decided that the family of Husain should be led as captives, through Kufa and Damascus, to the court of Yazid. Amr Saad, in consultation with some of the generals of his army, decided to march ahead, to convey to Yazid the news of what had transpired at Karbala and obtain the rewards which were promised. They felt that Yazid would be very pleased with them if they did their utmost to humiliate and subject the family of Husain to the worst indignities and insults. They were vying with one another to suggest in what form they could be tortured and tormented. Somebody suggested that it would add to their grief and agony if they were made to march by the bodies of their dear ones. Amr Saad fell in with this suggestion. Shimr and Khooli were asked to accompany the caravan of captives and to ensure that they were conducted to Damascus with the utmost despatch and hurry.

When the arrangements were completed, the officers who were appointed to bind the ladies and children hand-and-foot, went over to them.

They subjected them to the utmost brutal treatment and tied chains round their necks, hands and feet. The ladies were put on camel-back without any saddles. The ropes and chains were tied in such a way that they linked the hands of the ladies with the necks of the young children. These arrangements being completed, the caravan was taken from the mortuary, where the dead bodies were lying. Such was the discomfiture and grief of the bereaved ladies and children that, on beholding the corpses of the martyrs, they could not control themselves. Several of them flung themselves from the camel-back, in spite of the ropes and chains that bound them, and threw themselves on the dead bodies of their brothers, sons, uncles and other relations. The guards, who were deputed to accompany them, were ready with the lashes and they mercilessly used them, not sparing even young children, whose only crime was that they could not bear the sight of the dead bodies of their dearest ones strewn all over the place without a sheet, without a shroud, and could not control their grief and sorrow on beholding them.

One by one, all the ladies and children were put on the camel-back. They were not permitted to give vent to their grief and sorrow, or to weep over their dear ones. Ali Zainal Abedeen, who was heavily chained and manacled, was made to follow the caravan on foot, in spite of his suffering from high fever. The heads of the martyrs were carried on spears at the head of the procession.

According to scheduled plan, this caravan marched on rapidly towards Kufa. The plight of the captives was such that, if any child fell from the camel-back, the rope that tied it and the hand of some lady became taut, resulting in her toppling over from the camel-back. The soldiers who were accompanying them would immediately rush towards the child and the lady and use the lash before putting them back on the back of Camels.

Within a few hours, with rapid marches, the caravan reached the outskirts of Kufa. Shimr and Khooli, who were the leaders of this caravan, held hurried consultations amongst themselves. They decided that the caravan should be stopped at the gates of the city and a courier should be sent to the Governor, to inform him about their arrival.

When Zainab and Kulsum saw the walls of Kufa, they were reminded of the period when they had stayed in this very city for full four

years, during the time of their father. Their father, at that time, was the ruler of the Islamic countries, the Leader of the Faithful, and recognised as the successor of the Prophet. At that time all the ladies of Kufa were vying with one another to secure the favour of Zainab and Kulsum, to invite them to their homes, to secure their blessings for the children. On every auspicious occasion, they used to be invited with the utmost respect and reverence. Now Zainab and Kulsum wondered what treatment they would get in this same city, where they had enjoyed the highest respect and honour; whether the ladies and children of Kufa would remember them; whether they would extend to them any sympathy in their sorrow and bereavement. On second thought they realised that this city had betrayed their cousin, Muslim Ibne Aqil, when he had gone over there as Imam Husain's emissary and it would be futile for them to expect any consideration, any sympathy, any regard or respect from the people of this city, who had acquired a notoriety for the fickleness of their mind and who had become known as time-servers.

Very soon the courier, who had been sent to the court of Obeidullah Ibne Ziad, returned with the message of the Governor, saying that all the preparations had been made and the captives should be marched through the main bazaars of the city. On receiving this order, the caravan marched on. The captives saw throngs of people standing on both sides of the roads. Ladies and children were standing in balconies and windows, to have a glimpse of the captives. The town-crier was headed the caravan, to announce: "O people of Kufa, we are bringing to you Zainab and Kulsum, grand-daughters of the Prophet and the other ladies and children of the family of Husain, son of Ali. To those of you who do not know, we advise that Husain, who had risen against Yazid and refused to recognise his authority as the rightful Khalif of the Muslims, has been defeated and killed with his followers on the battlefield of Karbala. The members of his family are now being taken to the court of Yazid, to face whatever punishment he wants to inflict on them. People of Kufa, this is the fate that awaits all those who question the authority of Yazid, and no person, who tries to raise his finger against the Khalif, will be spared."

Many of the listeners, who had gathered there, were thunderstruck by this announcement. There were not a few who recalled all the kind-

ness that they had received from Zainab and Kulsum. They recollected that in times of their troubles and distress they had sought help from them and had willingly received it. They were surprised to see their plight; to see how miserable they were. They could well imagine their sufferings from their gaunt faces which bore marks of privations and afflictions. Many of them were crying on beholding their grief and sufferings but few had the courage to raise their voice against the forces of tyranny for fear that a similar fate may befall them.

When the caravan reached the main bazaar, there was such a big crowd that it became difficult to make way through it to the court of Obeidullah Ibne Ziad. The caravan halted for some time. It was almost noon and the sun was blazing with all its fury. The children of the Prophet's house, who had not had water during their march from Karbala to Kufa, were feeling extremely thirsty, not to talk of the pangs of hunger they were suffering. Many of them were crying with thirst and hunger. During this halt, the soldiers of Yazid, who were accompanying them, were partaking of food and water which they were carrying with them, and relaxing in the shade. Sakina was repeatedly asking her aunt Zainab for a little water; but Zainab knew that it was useless to request the guards for any mercy, or even for a drop of water. She had full recollection of the heartlessness of these very soldiers who had, till the end, denied even a drop of water to each member of her family—even to Ali Asghar, till his last breath. She recollected how her brother had been slaughtered asking for just one sip of water.

Seeing the plight of Sakina, a lady who was standing in her balcony, rushed down from her house with a cup of water. Breaking the cordon which had been formed by the soldiers, she went to Sakina and offered to her a tumbler of cool water she had in her hand. With gratitude, Sakina took it from her and wanted to drink it; but the lady, looking up at her, said, "I know that you are extremely thirsty and you appear to have suffered terribly. Before you drink this water, I request you to pray to God that He may protect my children from a fate such as has befallen you and the members of your family. Pray to God that my children may not be subjected to such miseries and tortures as you are suffering today."

Sakina complied with the request of the lady and she prayed to God, as she was asked by the lady to do. However, the words of the lady

recalled to her the stark reality of her miserable plight. She remembered how, not so long before, her every wish was being complied with, with the utmost promptitude; how her every word was taken as a command. She could not help shedding tears at what she had lost, what she had suffered and what she was still suffering. For some time she held the cup of water without drinking, because she could not control her sobs.

Zainab was seeing this and wondering about who the lady was, who had so kindly brought water for Sakina. She had heard the request of the lady, which had brought back memories of her father to Sakina. She thought that she could recollect the face of this lady, though two decades had elapsed since her leaving Kufa. With a little effort, she recalled that this lady was Umme Ayman, who had been visiting her so often when she was staying in Kufa, who was so much devoted to her and had always shown affection for her. She wondered whether Umme Ayman would recognise her. She had heard the town-crier announcing to the public their identity. Could it be possible that Umme Ayman had not heard the announcement and was not aware of it? To remove this doubt, Zainab turned to her and said, "Umme Ayman, I am thankful to you for your kind gesture to Sakina. May God bless you for the kindness you have extended to the bereaved family of the Prophet."

Umme Ayman looked at her with bewilderment. Apparently she had not heard the announcement about who the captives were. She looked hard at Zainab's face, but it seemed that she could not recognise her. Zainab had covered her face with her hair, because her veil had been snatched away. Even if she had not covered her face, such were her sufferings that she was looking several years older than her real age. The dust of the road had covered her face. Starvation and miseries suffered by her had brought such a change in her that a person seeing her after a few days could hardly have recognised her, much less a person who had seen her 20 years before. Umme Ayman, not recognising her, exclaimed in surprise, "Lady, I do not understand why you are referring to the Prophet's family. For aught I know, the Prophet's family consists of my Lord Imam Husain and his sisters, Zainab and Umme Kulsum, who, May God bless them, are in Medina. What you captives have got to do with my ladies, whom I had the honour to serve and meet, whom I am always remembering in my prayers, and whom I am longing to meet again."

Zainab could see that Umme Ayman had not been able to recognise her. She brushed aside her hair from her face and looking her full in the face, she said, "Umme Ayman, I am Zainab whom you are referring to and here is my sister Umme Kulsum. We are the grand-daughters of the Prophet, the same Zainab and Kulsum whom you want to meet. In what condition you are seeing and meeting us that you cannot even make out who we are! My brother Husain and our other brothers, nephews and sons were killed in Karbala by the soldiers of Yazid. If you will look ahead, you will see the head of your Imam raised on the spear."

When Umme Ayman heard Zainab say this, she turned in the direction indicated by her and saw on the spears several heads. One of them, she noticed, was turned in their direction. From the nobility depicted on the faces of the martyrs she could understand that they could belong to no other family than the family of the Prophet. She again looked hard at Zainab and her sister and recognition dawned on her. Flinging herself down at her feet, she cried, "My Lady, accept my sincerest apologies for what I have said. I could not recognise you. My God, what have the people, professing the religion of Islam, done to you! I could not in my wildest dreams imagine that they would subject you to such tortures, to reduce you to such a state!" Umme Ayman was crying bitterly. She was holding the feet of Zainab and kissing them out of reverence.

The guards who were accompanying the captives saw this and feared that this display of respect and reverence for the Prophet's family might to come forward and befriend the cause of the captives. They rushed to inspire others towards Umme Ayman with the whip. She was mercilessly whipped and thrown aside. The caravan was asked to proceed further immediately.

Wending its way through the narrow streets of Kufa, the captives reached the court of Obeidullah. The Governor was seated on a throne and holding his court. The captives were asked to march into the court.

When Zainab and Kulsum were brought before Obeidullah Ibne-Ziad, he ordered Husain's head to be placed on a salver and put at his feet. He asked Shimr to identify each member of Husain's family, because he could hardly believe, seeing their faces, that they could be the same Zainab and Kulsum, about whose dignity and bearing he had heard so much. He even mockingly remarked that his first impression was

that some slave girls had been brought before him instead of the grand-daughters of the Prophet.

Zainab, who was trying to control herself all along and silently suffer the insults that were being hurled at her, according to the promise given by her to her brother at the time of his departure in Karabla, for once lost her temper. Addressing Obeidullah Ibn-e-Ziad, she said: "O son of Ziad, we are the sisters of Husain, and grand-daughters of Muhammed (A.S.) whom you acknowledge as your Prophet. You and the other henchmen of Yazid have, for the sake of worldly gains, flouted all the principles of Islam, have desecrated the dead bodies of the martyrs, despite the fact that it is strictly forbidden by religion, and subjected us to the worst kind of ill-treatment, although the Prophet had enjoined on all the believers to treat the captives and, particularly women and children, with sympathy and consideration. Today you are gloating over your success and rejoicing; today you are thinking that you can insult and humiliate us to your heart's content because there is nobody to say a word to you on our behalf, because you see us in this helpless condition, with none to befriend us, none to protest against the treatment you are meting out to us. But O tyrant, let me warn you that you will find your success ephemeral and very soon the Wrath of God will descend on you and those whose cause you are espousing. Very soon nemesis will overtake you and the others who have ruthlessly killed my brother and all the members of our family without the least justification, without the least compunction, simply because they stood steadfast in their belief; because they refused to surrender their principles or compromise their ideals; because they refused to accept Yazid, whose stooge you are, as the spiritual leader of the Muslims on account of his being a known profligate, who has flouted all principles of Islam, trampled under foot all ethical concepts and reduced all human beings to an abject state."

Obeidullah Ibn-e-Ziad was stunned by this bold address of Zainab. He had never thought that she would dare to speak out so boldly in the helpless condition she was in. He had thought that she would be terrorised by the awe-inspiring atmosphere of his court, particularly at a time when she had suffered such calamities and cruel blows and undergone so much hardships. Not only he but all the courtiers who were present in his

court became speechless and listened with rapt attention to her peroration. After a while, he looked round him to see the effect which her speech had produced on those present in the court. He could see that everyone listening to her was hearing every word she was uttering with rapt attention. From the look on their faces, he could discern that they could not help admiring her wonderful courage in speaking out the truth in spite of her helpless position. He thought that many must be comparing her plain and forthright speech with the addresses of her illustrious father delivered to vast congregations from the pulpit in the mosque of Kufa. For a moment he got scared that, if she continued to speak in this vein, she might be able to sway the masses. He tried to stop her by shouting at the top of his voice and ordering her to hold her tongue and threatened to visit the worst kind of punishment imaginable on her and the other captives if she failed to hold her silence.

If Obeidullah Ibn-e-Ziad had counted on silencing Zainab by threats, he found himself mistaken. Undaunted by such threats, Zainab continued to speak with vehemence. She recapitulated how her brother and the other members of her family had dissociated themselves from all power politics and devoted their lives to the service of mankind; to helping the poor and downtrodden people; to befriending the widows and orphans. She contrasted their ways of living with the living of Yazid and his henchmen, how the latter had abandoned all sense of decency and indulged in vices which would disgrace even the meanest of mankind; how Yazid had by his utter disregard of all sense of decency, in spite of claiming to be the "Leader of the Faithful," cast a slur on Islam itself; how his preachings and precepts had demoralised all those who were looking to him as their king, and spiritual leader. She eloquently narrated the inhuman atrocities perpetrated by Yazid's forces in Karbala and how they had abandoned all humanitarian principles and sense of decency. Her words were sinking into the minds of all who were present there and, through most of them had sold their souls for a mess of pottage, they could not help admitting to themselves that every word of what she had said was fully justified. Several of those present in court were moved to tears. One of the aged companions of the Prophet Zaid bin Arkan who was blind, rose to admonish Obeidullah Ibn-e-Ziad for subjecting the Prophet's family to such indignities.

It did not take Obeidullah Ibn-e-Ziad very long to assess the situation. Cunning and crafty as he was, he realised that if he did not get rid of the prisoners from Kufa, there might be an uprising against him. He shouted down the companion of the Prophet and ordered him to be removed from the court. He rose from the throne on which he was sitting and hurriedly dismissed the court. He ordered Shimr and Khooli to take the prisoners post-haste to Damascus before they had any opportunity to address the public of Kufa. Both these servile minions were quite relieved to receive these orders, because they too had sensed the danger that lay ahead if Zainab got an opportunity to speak out. After hurried consultations, they decided to immediately take the prisoners out of Kufa and to take the least frequented roads to Damascus, so that they many not have to face any surprise attack or ambush, if any persons knowing about the tragedy of Karbala took upon themselves to avenge the martyrs.

The captives' caravan marched on and on through the deserts of Mesopotamia. The guards were instructed to let loose their worst vengeance on the helpless ladies and children and the ailing Imam, Ali Zainal Abedeen, who was following the caravan on foot. Due to sheer exhaustion, he used to fall down at every few steps, because a heavy chain was put round his neck and feet, which made marching at a brisk pace most difficult for him, particularly in the condition he was. Every time he stumbled and fell, some brute would jump down from his horse and mercilessly whip him.

During this march, Sakina fell down from the camel's back. Zainab, who was riding on the camel next to her's, raised an alarm, but the soldiers did not pay any heed to her. She did not know what to do in her desperate state, for she knew that, if Sakina, who had fainted on falling down from the camel, was abandoned in the desert, she would perish without any food or water, without any succour. In her desperation she turned towards the spear in front of the caravan on which her brother's head was elevated, and cried, 'Brother Husain, you had asked me to look after your beloved Sakina after you, but see in what a helpless condition I am. Your Sakina has fallen down from the camel-back and there is nothing that I can do to help her.' After saying this, she silently offered prayers for the safety of the darling child. Such was her boundless faith in God that she knew

that her prayers would not go in vain and something would happen to save Sakina.

The caravan had hardly gone a few steps ahead when the spear on which Khooli was carrying the head of Husain fell down from his hand and got planted on the ground. Khooli jumped down from this horse to uproot the spear but, try as he would, he did not succeed in plucking out the spear. It remained stuck in the ground as if it had been firmly cemented there. Khooli was at his wit's end as to what he should do about it. He knew that, if the other guards saw this strange phenomenon, they might get terrified and even desert their posts. Quietly he went over to Shimr and whispered into Shimr's ears what had happened. The warped mind of Shimr had a solution for Khooli's problem. He went over to Ali Zainal Abedeen, with the lash in his hands, and demanded to know what was responsible for the spear getting so firmly planted that it could not be moved from its place even by a strong and sturdy man like Khooli, whose physical strength was the only quality he possessed. Ali Zainal Abedeen looked up at his father's head. He thought he saw some tears trickling down the cheeks on the top of the spear. He looked in the direction of his aunt Zainab. She caught his eye and shouted to him that Sakina had toppled over from the bare-back of the camel and, in spite of her entreaties to the guards to pick her up, they had paid no heed to her. Shimr immediately ran back and picked up the child lying unconscious due to the heavy fall and the injuries she had sustained on account of it. As soon as Sakina was put in the arms of Zainab, Khooli was able to lift the spear from the ground. The caravan resumed the march, as if nothing had happened.

The march through the Syrian desert, with the prickly thorns strewn all over, was a cruel ordeal for Ali Zainal Abedeen, who was made to run with the camels on his bare feet. At night the caravan used to halt for a few hours, when the guards used to indulge in feasting and merry-making, giving the least possible food and water to the prisoners—barely enough to sustain them.

One night, they rested in the mountain-top hermitage of a recluse, who had devoted his life to prayers and meditation. Shimr gave the heads of the martyrs to him for safe keeping. Just one look at the face of Imam

Husain convinced the hermit that it was the head of a saint. He took it with him and keeping it near his bed, retired to sleep. At night he dreamt that all the Prophets and angels had descended from heaven to keep a watch over the head. He woke up from his sleep, startled and baffled as to what he should do. He decided to ask the leader of the guard about the identity of the persons whom they had beheaded and whose family they had taken prisoners. Rushing out of the monastery, he woke up Shimr and demanded to know who the martyrs were. When Shimr told him that the grandson of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.S.), who had defied the authority of the ruler Yazid Ibn Muawiah, and refused to acknowledge his spiritual suzerainty, had been killed by the army of Yazid and they were carrying the heads of all the persons who had been killed in Karbala, the hermit was shocked beyond words. Recovering himself, he said: "You cursed people, do you realise that you have committed the most heinous crime by beheading your own Prophet's grandson, who undoubtedly was a great saint. Fie upon you cowards that, not satisfied with what you have done, you are so brutally treating his innocent ladies and children and subjecting them to such atrocities!"

These words of the hermit enraged Shimr, who had even otherwise lost his temper with him for waking him up from sleep in the dead of night. With one sweep of his sword, he chopped off the hermit's head. This brute had little regard for the Prophet's injunctions and orders, granting fullest protection to those who had retired from the world and dedicated their lives to prayers and penance. When the life of the Prophet's own grandson was not spared by this brute, what regard he could be expected to have for the commands of the Prophet?

With hurried marches the captives' caravan reached the city of Damascus. On reaching the gates of the fortress surrounding the city, the caravan was halted and a courier was sent to inform Yazid about their arrival and to seek his permission to lead the captives to the court. For one full hour, in the blazing heat of the sun, the ladies and children were made to wait near the door of the city with throngs of people coming over to see them from close quarters. Many of them did not know who they were. They had a faint idea that some prince had risen against the authority of Yazid and had been defeated in a skirmish with the forces of Yazid.

They were told that all the dependants of the prince had been taken prisoners and were being taken before the Khalif to receive whatever chastisement he considered necessary for them in keeping with the gravity of their leader's crime against the ruler and his undisputed authority. It appeared that Yazid, who had received a discreet hint from Obeidullah Ibn-e-Ziad about the scene in his court at Kufa, was afraid to make known the identity of the prisoners in Damascus, although he and his father had complete sway over the people for at least a quarter of a century. In hurried consultations with his confidants, Yazid had decided that, till the prisoners were brought into his court, their identity should not be disclosed. He ordered that an announcement be made that a rebel against his authority had been defeated by his unconquerable armies and, to set an example to others, he had ordered the heads of the rebels to be brought to his court with their family. He had proclaimed that day to be observed as a day of rejoicing, to celebrate his victory. He had decreed that his court, the bazaars and the streets and every nook and corner of the city, should be gaily decorated to celebrate this day with full pomp and regalia befitting the occasion.

Whilst the city was assuming a festive look, whilst all the lanes and by-lanes were being decorated with festoons and buntings, the poor victims were suffering under the scorching sun, without any food or water. The children were crying with hunger and thirst. Some of the ladies from the onlookers were, out of compunction, without knowing to what family these children belonged, throwing sacrificial dry-dates towards them for the well being of their own young children and to ward off all evil from their own dear ones, according to the custom of those days. The hungry children were catching these dates thrown towards them to satisfy their hunger but Zainab and Umme Kulsum were asking them to throw them away. They were telling the children that the Prophet had forbidden his family to eat any such sacrificial offerings and asking them to suffer hunger rather than go against the Prophet's orders. They were requesting the ladies not to throw such offerings towards the children because they were from the Prophet's family. Many of the bystanders were baffled to hear these words of Zainab and Umme Kulsum, because they had no inkling about the identity of the prisoners. Many of the ladies were looking on with gaping mouths at Zainab and Umme Kulsum,

who had covered their faces with their long tresses in the absence of veils. The ladies of Damascus were whispering to one another whether it could be true that the prisoners were from the Prophet's family. They could not help seeing the remarkable nobility stamped on the faces of the prisoners. Though their faces and bodies were smeared with the dust and desert sand, there could be little doubt that they were from some princely family, from some noble stock.

After a wait of one full hour, orders came from the court of Yazid to bring in the prisoners. All the preparations were made in the mean while to summon the courtiers and ambassadors of foreign countries to the lavishly decorated court. When the prisoners were led into the court, Yazid was seated on an elevated throne, lavishly decorated with gold, and had seven hundred gilded chairs around him, wherein were seated his nobility and foreign emissaries. Yazid ordered the head of Husain to be placed in a gold salver and put at his feet.

When the prisoners were brought before Yazid, he could not for a minute believe that those before him in tattered rags, covered with dust and blood oozing out from the lash wounds and the cuts in the flesh from tightly tied ropes handcuffs and chains could be the grandchildren of the Prophet. He was quite drunk at that time and, without caring to look at their faces, he flew into a rage and bawled out: "Amar Saad, these are not the sisters and daughters of Husain and members of his family. Are you trying to cheat me by letting them get away and substituting in their place some slaves." He was quivering with rage as he said this and his eyes were blood-shot.

Amar Saad, who was present in the court and conjuring up dreams of the rewards his master would bestow on him for accomplishing the task entrusted to him, was scared out of his wits. He knew that Yazid had the habit of acting first and thinking thereafter. Particularly this trait in him was accentuated when he was drunk and he could see that, on this occasion, Yazid was far from sober. Flinging himself abjectly at Yazid's feet, Amar Saad mumbled: "Mercy, O Commander of the Faithful. Your humble slave has done exactly according to your august command and the prisoners you behold are Zainab and Umme Kulsum, grand-daughters of the Prophet of Islam, and sisters of Husain. The young girls

you behold are Sakina and Rokayya, daughters of Husain. The other ladies before you are Umme Laila and Umme Rabab and widows of Husain and the others are orphans and widows of Husain's friends and relations. And there before you is Husain's ailing son, Ali Zainal Abedeen."

Saying this, he raised his head a little from the ground to see the reaction on his master's face. Yazid had now focussed his eyes on the ladies whose names Amar Saad had mentioned. He saw that all of them had completely covered their faces with their tresses. In particular he noticed that one lady was standing behind an aged woman from the prisoners, as if she was being shielded from Yazid's gaze.

"Ah, there," he bawled out, pointing in the direction of the lady who had been screened off by the aged maid, "who is that one who is trying to seek shelter behind the old woman and why?" Amar Saad, rising to his feet, bowed abjectly and said, "Your Majesty, she is Zainab, daughter of Ali and Fatima and the old woman standing in front of her is Fizza, the Abyssinian princess, who takes pride in calling herself the slave of Fatima, and Zainab."

"I shall not let any one protect my prisoners before me," shouted Yazid in a rage. He asked Shimr, who was standing guard over the prisoners, to throw aside Fizza, so that he could have a full view of Zainab.

Seeing Shimr advance towards her, Fizza turned to the Abyssinian slaves, who were standing behind Yazid's throne with bare swords as his bodyguards, and said: "O brothers from my native land, what has happened to your fraternal and communal feelings that you silently watch an aged lady from your country being molested in this manner? With your drawn swords, can't you offer protection to your aged princess from the lashes of this tyrant, who has been our tormentor throughout the march from Karbala to Damascus?"

Hearing these words of Fizza, some of the slaves stepped forward and, addressing Yazid, one of the them said: "Your Majesty, ask Shimr to hold his hands and not to use the lash on our princess Fizza. If he does anything to her, today blood will flow like water in your court."

Yazid was flabbergasted at this affront of his slaves. Drunk though he was, he had sense enough to realise that they were serious and meant

what they said. The coward in him panicked at the sight of the bare swords glistening in the light of the chandeliers. He immediately shrieked a command to Shimr: "Stay where you are, Shimr, and do not budge an inch otherwise I shall have your head chopped off." Then turning to the slaves with a ^{dry} smile, he said: "My good fellows, I know you are all so devoted and faithful to me and always ready to protect and guard me. I shall not allow anything to be done to touch your sense of honour."

Yazid knew that the scene created by the slaves had humiliated him in the eyes of his courtiers and even the foreign emissaries. To show off his triumph and wreak vengeance for his humiliation, he took up the cane with a gold knob lying by his side, and started beating Husain's head with it. Using the cane on the lips and teeth of Husain, he shouted: "Ah, were not these lips receiving the kisses of Muhammad? How delighted would be my forebears to see that I have avenged them for the defeats they suffered in the battles of Badar and Hunayn at the hands of Muhammad? How happy their souls must be today to see that I, Yazid, have taken revenge for their defeats from Muhammad's grandson and his family!" He was chuckling with glee and drinking goblet after goblet of wine, which was making him more and more inebriated. All the ladies of Husain's family and Ali Zainal Abedeen were standing there weeping silently.

Whilst he was still busy with satisfying his vengeance, the ambassador of one of the foreign countries, whose name was Abdul Wahhab, felt disgusted at the callousness and brutality of Yazid. He could not bear the sight any more and rising from his seat, he said to Yazid "O King, I would like to know who was the person whose head you are having at the foot of your throne and whose lips you are hitting with your cane. What heinous crimes he had committed that you are treating him like this, even after death, and subjecting the ladies of his family to such harsh treatment?"

Wine had by now gone so much to the head of Yazid that he became boastful of his achievements. He told the ambassador of the foreign country that he had put to sword all the members of the family of the Prophet of Islam for not accepting and acknowledging him as the Khalif and spiritual leader of the Muslims. He added that he had all the ladies of the Prophet's house before him as his captives and he would subject

them to such punishment as the world had not witnessed before, so as to serve as an example to all people who might be having even the faintest idea to challenge and question his authority and sovereignty to deter all such persons from raising their voices against him.

Abdul Wahab, who was a man of learning and parts and who had heard a lot about the Prophet and his descendants and the nobility and piety of their lives, was surprised and shocked to hear this from Yazid. He could not help feeling the deepest admiration for Husain, who had defied the tyrant and refused to sell his conscience even though he had to suffer such a cruel fate. For once he forgot all diplomacy and protocol and said to Yazid: "O King, you have committed the greatest crime, not only against your own religion but also against humanity, by brutally massacring the Godfearing grandson of the Prophet of Islam and the male members of his family and taking as prisoners the ladies and children of his house."

This bold rebuke took Yazid aback, as he had least expected it. Before he could say anything, the ambassador continued: "My people are giving to me the highest respect and honour because I happen to be a descendant of one of their prophets. You lack all sense of decency to have so brutally butchered your own Prophet's grandson who, for aught I know, was so dearly loved by him."

Abdul Wahab then turned in the direction of Ali Zainal Abedeen and said: "Ali, from what I have seen and heard today I am convinced that your father was the boldest soul on earth to put up a fight against the forces of tyranny, oppression and injustice, as embodied in this usurper. Here and now I declare my faith in the religion, to defend whose principles your noble father sacrificed his all, and I want you, as the only true believer in this assembly of men, to bear witness to this fact. I do not care for the consequences of proclaiming my faith and denouncing the errant usurper, who is seated here on the throne and who is the very embodiment and incarnation of the worst qualities in mankind and an epitome of all that is evil."

Hardly he had finished saying this, when Yazid, now mad with rage and smarting under the insults and exposure, such as he had never expected, shouted a command to his guards to drag away the ambassador

and to chop off his head. His orders were carried out by his bodyguards immediately.

A pin-drop silence descended on the court. All the courtiers were stunned by the boldness of the foreigner who had spoken out the truth, in spite of knowing the dire consequences that would follow. Many of them admitted in their heart of hearts the truth of all that he had said and contrasted their own pusillanimity with his courage.

During this time, Yazid was gulping down cup after cup of wine to soothe his frayed nerves. Everybody was waiting anxiously to see on whom he would wreak his vengeance for the insults he had suffered in open court. They had not long to wait, for the tyrant, turning in the direction of Ali Zainal Abedeen, shouted: "You, there! You were responsible for the insults which that wretch hurled at me and I shall make you pay dearly for aiding and abetting him for encouraging him to denounce me and praise your father." He paused for a while as if his intoxicated head was muddled and confused in conjuring up what worst punishment he could inflict on Ali Zainal Abedeen. After a few seconds, he contained: "I shall get your head cut off here and now, in full view of everybody—before your mother, sisters and aunts and before all who are assembled here." Then, as if on second thought, he added: "No, No, killing you will not be enough. I shall torture you to death so that you will die by inches. I shall subject you to such tortures the like of which the world must not have seen, so that your life will become a living death, so that every day, every hour, every minute, you will yearn and pine for death to relieve you of all your sufferings."

As if this diabolical thought of devising cruellest tortures had soothed his sadistic mind, he burst into a loud, hoarse laughter. It was the hysterical laughter of a drunker, demon who had no control over his nervous system.

At this stage, Ali Zainal Abedeen in a feeble but clear, ringing voice said: "Yazid, the tortures and ignominies which you have so far inflicted on me can never be surpassed by anything that your crooked mind can think up. For me the worst possible torture has been my standing here with my mother and sisters, with my aunts and cousins, without any veils to cover their heads and faces. Do not for a moment think that I am scared

or frightened by your threats. We, descendants of the Holy Prophet of Islam, peace be on him, have been trained from our childhood to face afflictions and sufferings. We know that those who are loved by God are tried by Him and if they remain steadfast and true to their faith in Him, then only He bestows His Divine Favours on them in the life hereafter, which is permanent and not transitory like this worldly life."

The retort of Ali Zainal Abedeen evoked spontaneous murmurs of admiration from the courtiers who, in spite of themselves, could not help admitting to themselves that he was a true scion of the house of Muhammad (S.A.S.), whose faith in God, whose belief in the cause of Islam, nothing could shake or diminish.

On hearing the murmurs of admiration, Yazid, despite his drunken state, got scared. His reeling head conjured up possibilities of his courtiers staging an uprising against him in favour of Ali Zainal Abedeen. The cunning nature which he had inherited from his crafty father came to his rescue. He feigned a loud laughter and said: "Why are you blaming me, Ali, for what has befallen you all? It was God Who inflicted this punishment on you and your family for your father's obduracy and defiance of my lawful authority. You got what you deserved according to the Will of God."

"No, Oh tyrant," said Ali Zainal Abedeen, "do not dare to distort and misinterpret the words of God. He in His infinite Wisdom gives time and opportunities to men to see whether they act with justice or tyrannically ride rough-shod over the helpless, defenceless people. His punishment always overtakes the tyrants, sooner or later. Does not the Holy Quran narrate the instances of the prophets of God suffering untold hardships at the hands of the people to whom they had come to preach?"

This forthright reply rendered Yazid speechless. His befuddled mind could not think of anything in reply to Ali's retort. One of his subservient courtiers, ^{was} ever anxious to curry favour with him, thought up a plan to relieve the tension that was mounting. Getting up from his seat, he bowed before the throne and said: "Your Majesty, I beg of you to bestow Husain's favourite daughter Sakina on me as a slave in reward for the services I have rendered to you."

Hardly had the wretch concluded these words when Zainab, who was till then standing silently with her head bowed, with Sakina by her side, got infuriated as she had never been before and in a loud and ringing voice she said: "You wretched, servile minion of Yazid, have you lost all sense of shame that you want to enslave the Prophet's grandchildren? Is there none amongst you to object to the shameless request of this cur?"

Behind Yazid's throne, a velvet, gold-embroidered curtain had been drawn where the ladies of his harem were seated. As Zainab was protesting against the preposterous request of the courtier for enslaving Sakina, Yazid's favourite wife, Hinda, entered the enclosure reserved for his harem. She was a devout and pious lady who had, before her marriage with Yazid, served as a lady-in-waiting in Zainab's household during the time of Maula Ali's Khalifate. She had, even after her marriage, retained her love for and devotion to Zainab. Yazid, knowing this, had carefully concealed from his plans for killing Husain and had taken good care to see that she was not informed about the aftermath of Karbala. When she heard from behind the curtain the voice of Zainab and the mention of enslavement of the grandchildren of the Prophet, she got extremely perturbed. As if by premonition, she had become restless for several days and was seeing in her dreams Zainab and her sister Umme Kulsum, both weeping bitterly and telling her that they had lost their all in this world. She had, as if by intuition, gathered that her evil-minded husband was bent upon some heinous crime which she could not figure out.

When Hinda heard the words of Zainab, she could not contain herself. In a moment of frenzy she rushed out of the enclosure without a veil, demanding to know who had dared to talk about enslaving the children of the Prophet's house. Yazid was so perturbed by his wife, known for her matchless beauty throughout his kingdom, coming into the open court without her veil, contrary to the custom of those days, that he hurriedly shouted orders dismissing the court, gave instructions to Amr Saad to lead the captives to the darkest dungeons in the fort and to await his further orders. He then rushed from his throne and, throwing his robe on Hinda's head, he led her away into his palace. The good lady kept on requesting him to tell her what had transpired that day, who the prisoners were and why somebody had mentioned about the enslavement of the grandchildren of the Prophet. He gave her evasive replies and tried

to allay her fears by saying that the prisoners had nothing to do with the Prophet.

The captives' caravan concluded its journey in the dark, desolate dungeon of the fort of Damascus, which was infested with snakes and scorpions. As soon as the doors of the dungeons were locked, both Zainab and Ali Zainal Abedeen engaged themselves in prayers. They both prostrated their heads and prayed to Almighty God to grant them strength and courage to bear what was in store for them. They both thanked Him for sustaining them through their greatest hour of trial, for enabling them to put up with unparalleled humiliations without a word of complaint against His Dispensation.

ANJUMAN-E GHULAMAN-E ASGHAR
D LANE, KARADHAR,
KARACHI-2.

The Death in Prison

IT was dark inside the room of that house though the sun was blazing in all its glory outside. It would not be correct to call that place a house because it was in fact a prison; a prison that had been used for years for the confinement of criminals of the worst type. For years it had remained out of use and its stone-walls were damp and crumbling with decay. It was difficult for any person entering the room to see the persons who were kept inside for there was no light but only darkness visible. Only when the eyes could get used to the darkness some figures were discernible in that dark and dreary cell. There were some ladies and children huddled together and there was one man with them lying on a piece of cloth spread on the damp bare floor. If a person were to look closely at the inmates of the cell, he would find that the prisoners wore haggard looks—looks of sorrow, looks of despair and despondency. Those careworn faces were depicting indescribable sufferings. Those emaciated faces were reflecting the calamities suffered beyond human endurance.

Who were the occupants of the cell and what was the crime they had committed which had brought them to such a stage of suffering? If faces could be the index of their character, even a cursory look at them was enough to convince anybody that they were not capable of any offence, much less a heinous crime which alone could merit the treatment meted out to them. And what possible crime could the ladies and children have committed? Was it the man, young in years but ill and emaciated with privations and sufferings, whose actions had brought so much sufferings to his near and dear ones? Even that did not seem possible because, even in the dark corner of the cell, his head was prostrated in prayers. Could a man, who in the face of such trials and tribulations, did not forget his Maker, who in spite of his illness and sufferings sang the hymns in praise of his Lord, be capable of any atrocious crimes?

Suddenly the door of the cell opened and admitted some light into the cell. In that light it was possible to see that not only the man but even the

ladies were engaged in prayers. With the light coming in through that door it was possible to see that all the ladies had grey or white hair. From their faces it was obvious that it was not age that had turned their hair grey but the untold and excruciating pains and pangs of sufferings. Amongst the ladies there was one who was offering her prayers seated. Even a glance at her face ^{was} sufficient to reveal the reason why she did so. She looked so emaciated and starved that she did not have the strength to stand up even for a few minutes.

The person who had opened the door brought in a tray on which were placed a few stale morsels of bread. There ~~was~~ ^{were} a couple of pitchers of water with him. If you counted the inmates of the cell and the bread that he had brought as their feed, it was obvious that the food could not suffice for all. Could that be the reason for the starvation of the lady? Could it be that she gave her own ration to the children and starved herself? Yes, surely that must be the reason for, how could Zainab, the sister of Husain, eat her fill when her beloved brother's children, and the children of those who laid down their lives for him, had not enough to eat? Had not Husain, at the time of his last parting, commended the children to her care? Even if he had not done so, Zainab was the daughter of Ali and Fatima, who used to go without food for days together but could not bear to see a prisoner, a wayfarer, or an orphan go hungry.

Somebody has said: "Stone walls do not a prison make; nor iron bars a cage." Perhaps he meant that a prison could confine the bodies of the captives but not their thoughts which soar beyond, breaking all shackles, all barriers. If so, could one imagine where the thoughts of those prisoners were soaring? Yes, it was not difficult to surmise that. The thoughts of each one of them ~~was~~ ^{were} going back to that plain of Karbala, to the morning when they had with them all those who loved them and whom they loved beyond their lives; to that afternoon when there was an incessant procession of dead bodies being brought in by the aged Imam; to that evening when there was a hush in the battlefield, when there was nothing to be seen near the tents except the dead bodies of those whose strength and valour had only a few hours before struck terror in the hearts of the enemy. And undoubtedly their thoughts were ~~be~~ going back to that night when the tents were ablaze, when the thirsty children were

running helter-skelter from one burning tent to another, when their belongings were being plundered and looted.

The prisoners partook of their meagre repast and were engaged in prayers again. This was their routine. In some corner some lady who had finished her prayers was trying to suppress the tears that continued to well up in her eyes due to the constant remembrance of the loved ones she had lost on that fateful day. In spite of her best efforts she could not any longer suppress her sobs and weeping. She was weeping to give vent to her pent-up emotions which would otherwise have choked her.

Now the night has descended. But that hardly made any difference, because even during the day it was equally dark inside. For the prisoners there was no more food for the night. The young children drank a little water and went to sleep. As each child drank water, a sob was heard. Was it in remembrance of the brothers, the uncles and father who had died seeking water till the end?

In the dead of night Sakina got up with a shriek. She burst into torrents of tears. Her weeping and wailing aroused everybody. Zainab rushed to her side and tried to console her. "My beloved child, she said, how often I have told you that the last wish of your father was that you should endure all the sufferings that are inflicted on you with complete resignation to the Will of God?" The child tried to control herself and replied: "Dear Aunt, I know that but, in my dream I saw my father. He came to me and said: 'Oh Sakina you have suffered enough. My darling, the days of your suffering are over. Now I have come to fetch you. Come with me'! O' sister of my beloved father, I narrated to him in my dream all the sufferings I had endured since he did not come back from the battlefield. I told him how I had gone in the dark night in search of him. What a dream it was and what a disappointment it is for me to know that in reality I shall be away from my beloved father!" So saying she burst into uncontrollable lamentation. Such was the grief of the child that all the ladies lost control over their emotions and the wail of the ladies echoed through the prison walls.

Yazid in his palace adjoining the prison was pacing the floor. He heard the bemoaning and lamentations and sent for his slaves to enquire about the cause. Soon they hurried back to report what had happened.

When Yazid was told that Sakina had seen her father in her dream and was disconsolate, he asked his men to put the head of Husain on a silver salver, cover it with a silken cloth and take it to the prison.

In the dead of night the prison door was opened and Yazid's men entered with the covered tray. They placed it before Sakina. The child cried out: "I am not hungry and I do not want food. I only long to see my father. Why has he left me after promising me that he would not leave me for along?" One of Yazid's attendants removed the cloth from the tray. Sakina beheld the face of her father, the face that she had kissed a million times. It was the same dear, dear face though the beard was smeared with blood. With a cry she flung herself on the tray and snatched the head from it, hugging it to her heart. In indescribable grief she bent down over the head putting her small cheeks against the cheeks of her father as she used to do when he was alive. Within a few moments her sobs stopped but with it stopped her heart-beats also.

When Zainab saw the child lying motionless on the head of her father, she went over to her and whispered with tears in her eyes: "O Sakina, how long you will lie on your father's head." She touched her hand only to find that life was extinct, to find that Sakina had gone with her father never to return to this world where she had known nothing but tortures and torments since her becoming an orphan. She realised that her beloved father Husain had kept his promise given to the child in her dream not to leave her in the cell.

Ordeals in Damascus

"Eternal spirit of the chainless mind,
Brightest in ^udungeons liberty thou art"

DARK though the dungeon always was, it was made more gloomy after Sakina was laid to rest in a grave prepared for her in one corner for her eternal rest, for rest and repose which she had not known since the dawn of the day her father left her, never to return. So long as she was alive, she used to stand near the gratings which were opening on the street to get some fresh air and relief from the suffocating and stifling closeness of the prison atmosphere. Often the passersby used to see her pouring out her grief at the separation from her father. Some kindly ladies even used to halt near the barred opening to ask her who she was and how, in spite of her tender age, she was confined to such a cell. Sakina, on such occasions, used to tell them of her recollections of the bygone days in Medina where, as the darling of her father and her family, her every wish and desire used to be fulfilled, where all the members of her family were vying with one another to keep her happy. She used to recount the events of that fateful day when all her hopes vanished with the last march of her father.

Many of the passersby used to listen to her tale of woes and join her in her tears of agony. Now, whilst passing by the prison, they used to look with anticipation for the innocent face of the child and wonder why she was no more to be seen. Those with more curiosity were even asking the prison-guards as to what had happened to the girl whose face used to be framed in the grating, steeped in sadness and sorrow. The guards were at times telling them to mind their own business and not to let their curiosity land them in trouble. Those guards who had more kindness and feelings in them used to tell such enquirers in hushed tones that the girl they were asking about was sleeping her eternal sleep, freed from the woes and worries of an unkindly world that had denied her every comfort, nay, even consolation, after she had lost her father and her freedom.

Even now at times passersby used to hear prayers offered to God Almighty by the captives at all hours of the day and night. Some times the hum of prayers used to be choked by the sobs of some heart-broken mother whose thoughts would go back to the death of her beloved child.

* * * * *

A day dawned when there was a stir in the prison. The prison guards were told that the Queen of Damascus was to visit the prisoners and so everything should be done to make the atmosphere of the cell least obnoxious to Queen Hinda. They were asking one another what possible reason could there be for the Queen to visit the prisoners as she had never done so before.

One of the guards took it upon himself to inform the prisoners about the visit of the Queen and to tell them that, in case she enquired about the treatment received at the hands of the guards, to tell all good things about them and not to utter a word of complaint. When the guard entered the cell, he found that Imam Ali Zainul Abedeen was lying prostrate in prayers. He turned to Fizza, who was the oldest amongst the prisoners, to announce to all the prisoners about the visit of Hinda and to ensure that not a word of complaint was uttered against the treatment meted out to them.

With ushers announcing her arrival, Hinda entered the cell accompanied by a few of her ladies-in-waiting. When her eyes got accustomed to the darkness of the dungeon, she saw some ladies sitting with their heads bowed and faces covered with their tresses. She also saw in one corner the emaciated figure of Ali Zainul Abedeen, with heavy chains and menacles, engaged in prayers. For a few minutes Hinda was perplexed to see a grave in one corner of the cell and one lady resting her head on it. She instinctively went over to that lady and put her hand gently on her head and whispered to her: "My good lady, tell me ^{who} you are, to what family you belong and whose grave it is on which you are leaning. I can see from your face that you have suffered untold agonies. For God's sake let me know what is the cause of all your sufferings."

Hinda waited for a while but no reply came to her questions. Instead the lady burst into sobs which made any speech impossible for her. Hinda then turned towards another lady, who sat in a corner, surrounded by several others. She could guess that this lady must be the one whom the others were regarding as the elder and leader amongst them. She recalled from her stature and bearing that this was the lady who, when the prisoners had entered the court of her husband not so long ago, had addressed the court. Though at that time she could not hear what she had said, she could surmise that a person who, even in the helpless state of a prisoner, could muster sufficient courage to hurl defiance at the court, must be possessing unique courage and strength of character. Going over to her she sat down beside her on the bare floor, much to the surprise and consternation of her maids and ladies-in-waiting. Addressing her almost reverentially, Hinda said; "I have come to visit you today to learn something from you about the reasons of your sufferings and plight. For a long time I have been trying to find out who you all are, from what place you come and what heinous crimes you people committed that you are being subjected to this incarceration and made to endure such hardships."

Pausing for a while she continued, "My husband has been evading my enquiries and telling me that I should not concern myself with the affairs of his Government. Of late I have been getting dreams in which I see my lady Fatima, daughter of our beloved Prophet. She comes to me wailing and wringing her hands and telling me, 'Hinda, you are not aware of what has been done to my son Husain and what has befallen my daughters Zainab and Kulsum and the other ladies and children of our family. You are living in the lap of luxury whilst my children and grand-children are undergoing tortures and torments beyond human endurance.' Speaking softly in a barely audible voice she added; "So often I have seen her in my dreams in a disconsolate state that I find it impossible to rest in peace. Only last night she came to me in my dream and told me that her beloved Husain's daughter, Sakina had been relieved by death from her sufferings and pains. It has dawned on me now that, perhaps, My Lady's coming and bewailing in my dreams had some connection with your incarceration, though I wonder how it could be possible for the family of the Prophet to have anything in common with you all."

The last words of Hinda aroused Zainab from her stupor. She raised her head and looked Hinda full in the face. The eyes of the two ladies met for an instant—the one depicting bewilderment and enquiring, and the other reflecting a soul full of agony and anguish. Zainab's eyes conveyed to Hinda in that one instance volumes of her sufferings which no words, however eloquent, could have conveyed. Zainab could see that Queen Hinda, who not so long ago had been one of her constant companions in the days of her father, could not recognise her. Such was the toll taken by the hardships she had suffered that she could not be recognised even by one who had been so close to her. She reflected that if Hinda did not know who she was, so much the better for her. It would save her the humiliation of narrating all the tortures she had been put to, enumerating the countless indignities she had suffered.

Much though Zainab tried to control her feelings, she could not help bursting into sobs. She had partially covered her face with her hair and she had hoped that Hinda, not recognising her, would leave her without pressing further to know who she was. But Hinda, in that one instant, felt as if she had seen this venerable lady in better times and better circumstances. The lady retaining such dignified mien and bearing and holding her own even in such squatted surroundings, could only be from some family of the highest lineage. Hinda taxed her memory to the utmost extent to recollect when and where she had met her before. She bent over Zainab and parted the hair covering Zainab's face so that she could have a closer look at her. At that very moment she felt she recognised who this lady was. With a gasp she cried; "If my eyes are not deceiving me, I am seeing my Lady Zainab before me! But, my God, how can this be true? Am I imagining the wildest thing possible or seeing a night-mare? O how can it be possible that the daughter of Ali, Leader of the Faithful, and beloved and respected daughter my Lady Fatima, the favourite and beloved sister of Imam Husain, be here in such dismal surroundings, in such abject circumstances? Is my memory playing some cruel trick on me that I see my respected Zainab in the person of this lady on whose face sorrows and sufferings are writ large?"

Hinda, uttering these words, bent further and beseechingly said to Zainab, "O lady, I am at the moment getting demented by the thought that I see before me the family of the Prophet of Islam, though this very idea is so absurd, so ridiculous and so revolting to me that I consider it almost a blasphemy to entertain it even for a moment. I think I am losing my senses and, unless you tell me who you are, I will get deranged with doubts that are gnawing at my mind. I implore you to let me know, for the sake of my Lady Fatima, who has been coming in my dreams, in what way you are related to my Lady Zainab whom I have been longing to see all these years."

"O lady", with a sob she continued, "if you have any blood relationship with her, tell me when you saw her last and how she was and how were Umme Kulsum, Umme Farwa, Umme Laila and Umme Rabab. I am dying to get news about them and their children who, by God's Grace, must now have grown up, and may even have reached marriageable age."

When Zainab heard these words of Hinda, as if in a flash, she saw before her mind's eyes those young stalwarts, those hopes of the family of Bani Hashim, who were mercilessly slaughtered in Karbala before her eyes. She could see before her mind's eyes the faces of Ali Akbar, Qasim, Aun, Muhammad and the innocent face of Ali Asghar. She could no longer contain herself and she cried, "Hinda, forget Zainab about whom you are talking—that Zainab died on the plains of Karbala with her brother and the youths of the family who were martyred with her brother Husain. Hinda, you see before you the shadow of that Zainab whom neither you, nor any other person can recognise or care to recognise." With these words she hid her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

When Hinda heard this Zainab's anguished outcry, she fell prostrate at her feet. Overcome by contrition, she cried; "Zainab, my lady, forgive me my unpardonable neglect. O God, how could I be so callous as not to understand and recognise that none except my Lady Zainab could have had the boldness to defy my tyrant husband in his court on that day! I implore you, my lady, by the memory of your beloved mother Lady Fatima, to forgive me my sin in not doing anything for your freedom. O', how could I live comfortably in my palace, surrounded by all the pomp and luxuries which money and worldly means can buy, when members of the family of my lord Husain were confined to this dungeon, when

his own children were in shackles and hand-cuffs!" Saying this she turned to the corner where Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen was sitting after just completing his prayers. She went over to him and throwing herself at his feet she cried; "Now I can very well recognise you as my Imam Husain's eldest son Ali, who have acquired name and fame throughout the Islamic realm for piety and prayers."

"O', Zainal Abedeen," she sobbed, "I seek your forgiveness for my thoughtlessness in not probing deeper, when my suspicions were aroused on the day of your presentation in my husband's court, when I had distinctly heard some one say that a heartless beast had talked about enslavement and bondage of the Prophet's grand-child."

Saying this she looked round her, as if searching for somebody. As she could not find the person whom she was looking for, she continued; "I do not see amongst you the young girl who was with you in court, who was clinging to my Lady Zainab and crying disconsolately. Now I know that she must be the beloved daughter of my lord Imam Husain. Where is she? What has happened to her? Was she at last enslaved by some brute?"

All this while Zainab was sitting with her head bowed. She now stood up and, going towards Hinda, she said, "In vain you are looking for Sakina, my beloved niece, whom my brother had, at the time of his departure, entrusted to my care. She is sleeping peacefully in that yonder grave. She is at last relieved from her pains and sufferings by a kindly death which has given her comforts which, in our state of imprisonment, we could not provide to her."

"May I ask, Hinda, what was the cause of her death?" enquired Hinda. "Did she die because of any disease or because of denial of food and other necessities of life?"

"Hinda," replied Zainab, "how am I to tell you what led to her death. This fragrant flower of our family withered away due to not one but several causes. How can I tell you, Hinda, what sufferings she endured ever since the martyrdom of her father? She was mercilessly slapped, her ear-rings were snatched away most callously and cruelly, tearing her ear-lobes the wounds of which kept on bleeding till the last, because we had been denied all means of treatment. Her young body had become all purple and blue because of injuries sustained by her when repeatedly she used to fall from the bare-back camel she was made to ride during our march from Karabla to your city."

Recounting these sufferings of the child, Zainab was crying, and so was everyone, including Hinda. Only one lady, who was sitting near the grave, was quiet. Her head was resting on the grave and she was lying motionless. Zainab instinctively looked in her direction and seeing that Umme Rabab had swooned and lost her consciousness, she ran towards her and put her head on her lap. Hinda also came over to her and ordered her maids to bring some cold water from the nearby palace. It was brought post-haste according to Queen Hinda's orders and sprinkled on the face of Umme Rabab. It revived her. Opening her eyes, she looked round her with a dazed look. She faintly uttered, as if in a trance: "My Sakina is sleeping here. Please do not talk loudly as it may disturb her peaceful sleep. She always used to get up from her sleep crying, as she used to dream sometimes of burning of our tents in Karbala, some times of the cruel whipping or slapping of her face by Shimr. Now, at long last, she is having an unbroken sleep. Do not, for Allah's sake, wake her up."

Zainab realised that Umme Rabab's grief-stricken mind had built up barriers to resist the cruel impact of reality; to create a shelter for her so that she could escape the grief-laden atmosphere around the grave of her child. But she felt that she must be awakened from this stupor now or else she would for ever lose her mind. She slowly told her that Sakina had been called away by her father but she should not worry about her. She was now happy and relieved. Her father had responded to her repeated entreaties to come and take her away, to put an end to the pains and pangs, both physical and those of separation. These words brought Umme Rabab back to the world of stark reality. She wept bitterly which lightened the burden on her emotion-packed heart. Hinda and all the ladies who were in the prison, joined her in the mourning.

It is common for people in whose house death occurs to receive people offering sympathies and condolences, to console the grief-stricken and bereaved members of the family. When Sakina died there were no callers, no mourners, no sympathisers to come and offer comfort to the ladies of the Prophet's house. They were consoling one another. There were no outsiders to take care of the funeral rites of this innocent child. For the first time after so many days Zainab, Umme Kulsum, Umme Rabab and other ladies of their family were having with them sympathetic ladies offering condolences and comforts, sharing their grief, crying

with them and uttering words of consolation. What a balm these kind words provided to the grief-torn hearts of Zainab and Umme Rabab can be understood only by those who have been placed in such a predicament. Would to God that nobody may be placed in such a situation in a strange land, in a friendless world!

All this while Hinda was thinking furiously about ways and means of securing the freedom of the Prophet's family. She had decided that she would not under any circumstances allow a day to pass without having the prisoners set free and restored to a position of respect and honour which was their right and due. She begged of Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen and Zainab to excuse her for a while and returned to the palace. She called her young son Moawiah, who was the only male issue of Yazid, and told him everything that had transpired that day. Her son had inherited many of her good qualities and he at once told her that he would join her in telling Yazid that, now that they both knew who the prisoners were and what had been done by Yazid to the beloved grandson of the Prophet, they would not live in the palace unless the Prophet's family were restored full liberty and honour.

Hinda and Moawiah both rushed to the private quarters of Yazid where only they had access without any prior announcement. They were surprised to see Yazid pacing up and down and muttering to himself. They could hear him mumble: "Alas, what made me decide to dye my hands with the blood of Husain and the youths of his family! What made me subject the members of his family to indignities and imprisonment! I thought I was removing a thorn from my side but, by doing that, I have lost all peace, all mental equilibrium."

When Yazid saw Hinda coming towards him with her hair dishevelled and her eyes full of tears, followed by his young son Muawiah, whose eyes were also swollen with crying, he was bewildered and surprised. His reverie was broken by their arrival and he wondered what had brought them to him in such a condition. However, before he could ask them the reasons and the purpose of their visit, Hinda narrated to him her dreams leading up to her visit to the prison and what she had seen and heard that day. She was beside herself with grief and rage and, forgett-

ing the consequences of her tyrant husband's wrath, she plainly told him that she and her son had decided that, if members of the Prophet's family were not set free that very day, both of them would denounce him for the tyrant that he was, no matter whether he beheaded them or threw them into the dungeons or subjected them to the worst kind of tortures.

Yazid was not accustomed to this kind of talk from his Queen who, much as she detested and dispised his despotic ways, was always gentle and soft-spoken. He was stupefied and for some time rendered speechless by the bold and dauntless attitude of his wife and son.

Thinking that Yazid was considering some diabolical plans to punish them for the defiance they had hurled at him, Muawiah said, "Father, young though I am, I realise that what my mother says is the only honourable course we can now adopt. All these days we remained ignorant of what had happened because of our callousness. May God forgive us for our neglect and our failure to alleviate the sufferings of my lord Imam Husain's family. The situation does not admit of a moment's delay and we want you to decide here and now what you intend to do in this matter."

Cunning and crafty as Yazid was, he knew that his cup of cruelty was getting filled to the brim. His secret agents had reported to him that, after Sakina's death, many ladies of Damascus were taunting their husbands, brothers and sons and accusing them of cowardice in not doing anything for the liberation of the family of the Prophet. Many men were talking secretly about ways and means of securing freedom for the ladies of the house of Imam Husain, and Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen. They were asking one another what the prisoners had done to deserve and merit such prolonged imprisonment in a dungeon-and cells. He could now see the writing on the wall. Realisation now dawned on him that time was running out for him, that nemesis might over-take him unless he did something to save the situation. Now that his own son, his own flesh and blood, and his Queen Hinda, were also asking for nay, even demanding, the liberation of the prisoners, he could see which way the wind was blowing. In his crooked mind a thought came that if he agreed to set

free the prisoners now, he might be able to save his face and say to outsiders that he did it in deference to the wishes of his own wife and son and not by way of succumbing to popular demand. His warped mind was always apprehending that, if he bowed to the wishes of his subjects, then he may lose his authority over them. In his heart of heart he had a fear that the public may accept Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen as their leader and dethrone him. At the same time, coupled with concern for the safety of his throne, he had within him a deep-rooted feeling of remorse which was exacerbated by the night-mares he was getting. For days together he had not been getting any sleep. Whenever he would close his eyes, he would see the Prophet, standing before him, full of grief, upbraiding him and asking him; "O Yazid, what had my Husain done to deserve your vengeance? What made you destroy my family with such vengefulness and brutality? Is your hatred for me and my family still not satiated that you are subjecting the widows and orphans of my family to such inhuman tortures?" He was constantly haunted by such dreams and he had been brooding about the ways and means of resolving the dilemma that was confronting him and which was very much of his own creation. That instant he decided that the time was most opportune for him to set free the prisoners and to send them away from Damascus as early as possible so that his position and power may not be endangered, his authority may not be dented.

"What a strange way of pleading for mercy and clemency you have adopted," said Yazid, turning towards his wife. "If both of you are so much filled with pity and sympathy for the prisoners, could you not plead for them in a better way than remonstrating before me in this fashion?" He paused for a while to see the reaction of his words on them and then continued, "I am glad to accede to the request of both of you and to set free the prisoners honourably. I am summoning my court and announcing my decision immediately. Now both of you may rest in peace and let me also have some respite after the shock you have administered to me by your remonstrations."

"Peace, did you say?" said Hinda in surprise. "Can you think that I, or my son, can ever have peace in this life after knowing what you did to the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and his family, in furtherance of your diabolical designs? Are the things you did, even after the massacre of Karbala, not enough to make us hang our heads in shame and fill our hearts with remorse and contrition? Would to God that I had not lived to see this day, to know that my lord Imam Husain's beloved daughter Sakina was dying by inches in the dungeon, while I was living in comfort, oblivious of her sufferings, ignorant of the ordeals and handships of my ladies Zainab, Rabab and others of the Prophet's family and Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen!" Saying this she wept bitterly.

After a while she continued, "Yazid, I want you, for the sake of Allah and His Prophet, if you at all have any belief in them, to make best amends for the unforgivable atrocities you have perpetrated, for the unpardonable sins you have committed. Spare no efforts in repairing the damage and loss you have caused to the people of the Prophet's house, for whom God has carved out a niche of honour and respect in the hearts of all true believers. It may perhaps be too late to redeem your sinning soul from the eternal perdition which you have earned for yourself by your atrocious actions, still the least that you can do now is to restore Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen, and the venerable ladies who are with him, to the place of honour which is their right."

Muawiah, who was standing quietly by his mother's side all this while, shedding tears silently, joined his mother in asking for full restitution for the family of the Imam. With full assurance from Yazid that he would leave no stone unturned in doing so, they left him.

Yazid lost no time in summoning his court that very same day. He issued orders to his Court Minister to place a pulpit next to his throne and to make special arrangements, with curtains and draperies drawn for the ladies of the family of Imam Husain. Instructions were despatched post-haste to call an iron-smith for cutting and removing the shackles, manacles and chains in which Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen, and others with him, were bound.

It was late in the evening when the court was assembled. There was full display of all the regalia associated with the Ummayyad court. Yazid was seated on the throne, decked in a jewelled dress of silk and brocade. All the dignitaries of the realm were present, dressed in their best raiments. All the accredited representatives of friendly foreign countries were seated in their chairs to witness an event of which they had no prior intimation. Many were puzzled at the manner in which the court had been summoned at such a short notice, contrary to the custom and practice of Yazid's Government. They were asking each other what could be the occasion for the holding of the court. Some were even hazarding guesses which were nothing but flights of fancy.

Those present in the court had not long to wait as the ushers announced, with all solemnity, that the great-grandson of Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen was entering the court and the venerable ladies of his household were gracing the occasion by their presence behind the curtains which had been drawn for them. They saw Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen enter the court and walk over to the pulpit with a slow, halting gait, as if despite removal of the chains, his aching, lacerated legs were finding the walk an ordeal. Most of them, who were present in this same court when Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen, and the ladies of his family were some months before brought in chains in the court, were shocked to see that time and tortures had taken a very heavy toll and the Imam was emaciated and attenuated to such an extent that, but for the ushers' announcement, it would have been difficult for them to recognise him. His garments were also torn and tattered. But, in spite of all this, there was dignity in his bearing, there was a radiance on his countenance, a halo on his face, which inspired awe in their hearts. As if drawn by the magnetism of his personality, they all stood up from their seats to do homage to the personality of this noble scion of the Prophet's house who had borne tortures and torments, who had suffered insults and indignities but never for a moment wavered, never for an instant faltered in his resolve, never for a second thought of asking for any favours or any facility for himself, or even for the ladies and children who were suffering with him. Seeing this spontaneous gesture of the courtiers, Yazid also got up from his throne, as if impelled by an uncontrollable force. The Imam slowly mounted the pulpit saying "In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful." There was

pin-drop silence in the court which was only broken by the rustling of the curtains indicating that, simultaneously with Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen, Zainab and the other ladies with her, had entered the court through the separate entrance reserved for them and had taken their seats in the curtained enclosure behind the pulpit.

After Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen had taken his seat on the pulpit, Yazid broke the silence by offering him condolences on the passing away of young Sakina. His words of sympathy were sounding so hollow in the light of his callous conduct throughout that he hurriedly changed the subject and started offering his apologies for all that had happened. As if to save his face, he started cursing Obaidulla Ibne Zaid, Amr Ibne Saad and Shimre Ziljaashan for giving him wrong information about the aims of Imam Husain. Pretending utmost contrition, he expressed profound regrets at all that had transpired in Karbala and the subsequent events upto that day. In an abject tone he told the Imam that he and his family were now free to stay where they liked, to go where they liked. He also offered to the Imam whatever amount he named as "blood money" for the martyrs of his family. When he mentioned this, the Imam's face turned red with rage. Seeing this, Yazid hurriedly added; "O Ali Zainal Abedeen, what I am offering is permitted by our religious code and I beseech you to accept it".

Before Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen could reply to him, Zainab, who was listening to the talk from behind the curtain, cried out, "O Yazid, are you not satisfied with wounding our feelings and torturing us all these days that you want to re-open our hearts' wounds by this offer? If you think that your wealth can undo what you have done to the family of the Prophet, you offer what you possess on the day of reckoning to the Prophet himself when he questions you about his grandson." ^{Seeing this} she wept copiously and then continued; "O Yazid, it is not for us to accept any requital, recompense or blood money for those who were martyred by your orders. If you have called us today with the expectation that we will accept what you want to offer to us, you are very much mistaken. Your actions will be judged by Allah and His Prophet and you will have to answer to them for your tyrannies on the Day of Judgement."

Yazid was abashed by the bold retort of Zainab. He had experience of her courage and defiance when she had first time appeared in his court in the most trying circumstances. He knew that, if he dared to say any thing more, he would get from her even stronger rebuff. He immediately changed the subject and, addressing Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen, he said, "O, Grandson of the Prophet, you are free now to demand anything that I have. I am issuing orders that a house be placed at your disposal and you may be accorded the treatment befitting your dignity and status in life. It is now for you to decide whether you desire to stay on in Damascus or leave for Madina. Your respected aunt Zainab and your family have my solemn assurances that henceforth highest honour and respect will be extended to you all as befits those belonging to the family of the Prophet of Islam."

Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen informed Yazid that he did not want anything from his worldly possessions. He added that all that he wanted was the severed heads of the martyrs of Karbala which had been kept in his vaults, and their looted property and clothes of which they had been robbed and deprived on the evening of the tragedy of Karbala.

This reply evoked considerable surprise in Yazid. He could not understand how a person could turn his face away from the offer of all the good things of life which he had made. Suppressing his surprise Yazid remarked: "O, Zainal Abedeen, I have seen all the belongings of you and your family which were looted by my army in Karbala. I could not see in them anything of value. Except for the house-hold articles and clothes, which were all well-worn, there were no ornaments, jewels or articles of gold and precious stones."

When Zainab heard these words of Yazid, she could not contain herself. Before Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen could say anything in reply, she spoke up, "How can we explain to you, Yazid, how we value our belongings which have incalculable sentimental value for us? Amongst the articles, which were snatched away at the time of our capture in Karbala, are the veil which my mother Fatima Zehra used to wear and which I inherited from her on her death. There is also the blood-stained garment worn by my brother Husain when he was beheaded by Shimr. It was woven by my mother with her own hands. There are

garments soaked in the blood of our sons, nephews and other kith and kin. There are earring-rings which were snatched away from the ears of my dearest Sakina, tearing her ear lobes. Can anything you possess or all that your wealth can purchase, match these raiments and articles? No, Yazid, we shall cherish these things as our most precious possession till the end of our days."

Realising that utmost sentimental value was placed on the looted articles by Zainab and the other members of Imam Husain's family, Yazid ordered his men to restore all these objects to them immediately. He also issued orders that a house may be placed at their disposal and all kinds of facilities and amenities may be provided to them. On his enquiries, Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen informed him that, he and the members of his family, did not want to stay long in Damascus but wanted to return to Madina; but before they did so, they wanted to visit Karbala to bury the martyrs' heads which were now given over to them.

After this brief session the court was adjourned and the Imam and his family were taken to the house near the palace which was placed at their disposal. Queen Hinda insisted on accompanying Zainab and Umme Kulsum as a lady-in-waiting, performing the duties which she was performing in the days of yore at Kufa.

On reaching the house, Zainab found that a large number of ladies and men had collected there. On her enquiring about the purpose of their visit, she was told that the populace of Damascus had come on a condolence visit. The men surrounded Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen and offered condolences to him. The ladies of Damascus went over to the separate quarters where ladies of the Prophet's family were sitting and, going over to each one of them, offered their sympathies. Many amongst them were asking for details of the tragedy. Some were asking them about Sakina, whose days in Damascus as a prisoner were so fresh in their minds and whose ordeals, from the day she had entered the city's portals, were vividly remembered by them. Zainab, on behalf of all the ladies, recounted to them all the events, from the day they left Medina to the fateful day when they lost all whom they loved in the world, who were dearer to them than their lives. She narrated each incident with tears flowing torrentially from her eyes. All the other ladies of the family, and the ladies of Damascus were shedding tears with her. She

even recalled in details the days passed in Damascus, from the day of their entering the city to the day when Sakina, unable to bear the miseries and torments inflicted on her, had surrendered her young and innocent life to her Maker. She also described the events leading upto their release and mentioned her desire to go back to Karbala to bid a final farewell to all the dear departed ones whose bodies they had left on the burning sands of Karbala without any cover, without even shrouds.

With one voice all the ladies persuaded Zainab and other members of her family to stay on in Damascus. Their menfolk also used their best persuasions to make Imam Ali Zainab Abedeen stay on in Syria. But nothing they said could change the decision of the Imam and his family to leave Damascus.

Under orders of Yazid canopied camels and best horses were procured for the journey to Karbala. All the citizens of Damascus had turned out to bid farewell to the Prophet's family. Men, women and children were crying as one by one the ladies, assisted by the Imam, ascended their mount. Hinda, who had all along remained with Zainab to offer solace and comfort to her in the best manner possible, went from one lady to another offering her sympathies and asking for forgiveness for the previous neglect on her part. She was about to leave when she heard Umme Rabab express her wish to Zainab that, before leaving Damascus, they may visit the prison and offer their last Fateha at the grave of young Sakina. Zainab immediately assented to this suggestion and, with Hinda accompanying them, the caravan wended its way towards the prison-house. The Imam and all the ladies dismounted and went over to the grave of Sakina. The disconsolate mother fell on the grave with a heart-rending shriek. "Sakina, my darling," she cried, "we all are free at last, but it is your lot to remain for ever and for ever within the four walls of this prison. My dearest child, I am leaving you alone in this strange country, where you had experienced nothing but hardships, torments and tortures. My child, I am leaving you but my heart and soul will remain with you in this prison." Saying this, she turned to Hinda and the other ladies of the town who had joined them and whispered, "I am leaving my dearest daughter in your midst. There is none from our family in this city to visit her grave, to offer Fateha and flowers. I beseech you, once in a way to visit my lonely, luckless child's grave for offering Fateha and flowers." With these words she fell unconscious in the arms of Zainab.

The Journey's End

"Princess, if our aged eyes,
 "Weep upon thy matchless wrongs;
 It's because resentment ties,
 "The terrors of our tongues".

IT was evening of 30th Muharram 61 in Medina, the city of the Prophet, on which a kind of gloom had descended since that day in the holy month of Rajjab when Imam Hussain and his family left it on their fateful journey. The lowering clouds were darker than usual as if they were gathering on the evening blast to herald some happening of very great and grave import. Many elderly people in the bazaars were exchanging meaningful glances with each other as if they were having premonition of some momentous events or some upheaval of far-reaching effect. Some of them, feeling intuitively a heaviness of heart, were rushing towards the tomb of the Prophet to seek solace and comfort there, as was their wont on such occasions. A few more superstitious amongst them were feeling apprehensive as if some doom were to descend on them. The atmosphere had become so close and suffocating that men, women and children rushed out of their houses to breathe the air outside. Accustomed as the inhabitants of Medina were to the oppressive heat at times experienced in that oasis, they could not help remarking that on this particular evening, it was not only heat that was stifling them but something besides, inscrutable, inexplicable, unescapable and ominous, presaging and foreboding something calamitous.

Those of the inhabitants of Medina who had gone out of the town to rest in the palm-groves in the suburbs saw a cloud of dust rising in the distant horizon. When the dust had settled down, they saw a few riders galloping post-haste towards the city. The youngmen, anxious to know who the riders were and why they were riding at such break-neck speed, mounted their colts and went out to meet them. When they came near the riders, they enquired who they were and why they were riding their steeds so fast. The riders did not stop their chargers to reply to the enquiries but rode on, gesturing to them to follow them to the city,

if they felt interested to know what they had come to herald in Medina. Following this hint, those youngmen harkened all their friends and companions to return to the town to hear the proclamation which the dispatch-riders were obviously carrying from the rulers in Damascus.

As the King's couriers entered the limits of Medina, more and more people joined them. They all followed the dispatch riders to the tomb of the Prophet. The town-crier was summoned by the Governor of Medina, who had also repaired to the Prophet's mosque on learning about the arrival of the King's heralds. He ordered a drum to be beaten, summoning all able-bodied citizens to gather at the tomb of the Prophet for hearing the important announcement and the proclamation. Very soon a huge throng was collected and the Mosque adjoining the tomb was packed to capacity. In their anxiety to hear the momentous news, people forgot the oppressive heat and choking closeness of the atmosphere. Deep down within them every man, woman and child had a feeling, rather a foreboding that something calamitous was in store for them; some tidings of disaster were coming to them.

When the mosque was jam-packed with men, women and children, in a loud and stentorian voice the herald from Damascus proclaimed: "O people of Medina, be it known to you all that Husain, son of Ali, and grandson of the Prophet, who had left Medina with his kith and kin and followers and who had refused to owe allegiance to the Leader of the Faithful, Yazid, son of Moawia, was engaged in a battle on the plains of Karabala and he and his followers and supporters were put to the sword. His womankind were taken prisoners along with the children. They were taken to Damascus, with the severed heads of Hussain and his followers, and paraded through the streets of Kufa and Damascus so that their plight may serve as an object lesson to those who may dare to defy the authority of the Ruler." The court messenger paused for a while to see the effect produced by his announcement. The pin-drop silence was broken by the heaving of sighs which escaped the lips of all those assembled there as if in unison. Many burst into sobs. Several ladies and children shrieked and swooned. An angry outburst of remonstrance escaped the lips of quite a few valiant ones. Sensing that it was necessary to nip all trouble in the bud, the messenger shouted at the top of his voice his command to silence the gathering. Once again pin-drop silence descended on the

gathering and the herald continued: "I am ordered by Yazid bin Moawia to proclaim to you that he has separately conveyed to the Governor of Medina instructions to exterminate those of you who in any way, by words or deeds, show any feelings or sympathy for Hussain bin Ali, grandson of the Prophet, or the members of his family or his followers, whatever your relationship or family ties with them may be. Any disregard of this warning would not only invite direst consequences and calamity on the person showing such recalcitrance but also on his entire family. The punishment for any expression of support, or even sympathy, for the people of the Prophet's house will not stop at the death of the person concerned but would lead to the extirpation of his entire family."

The ominous words of the king's emissary rendered the audience dumbfounded. They were all hushed into an eerie silence as if some magic spell had been cast round them. The silence was only intermittently broken by some uncontrollable sobs or stifled cries of agony, involuntarily escaping the lips of some grief-stricken ladies. The Governor of Medina and the messengers from Damascus, including the person who had read out the proclamation, sat silently surveying the situation. They appeared to be pleased with the effect their threat had produced on the assemblage and they were waiting as if to let the effect further sink into the hearts of the terror-stricken people.

Suddenly they saw an aged lady, draped in veil, tearing through the gathering and advancing towards the dais where the Governor and the messengers from Damascus were seated. She was holding the hand of a lad who appeared to be hardly five or six years old. She was walking with such dignified gait that all the faces were turned towards her in awe.

The lad, whose hand was held tightly by the venerable lady, was making efforts to free himself from her grip. Young though he was, he seemed to be possessing extra-ordinary strength as, with a little effort, he was able to extricate himself from the firm hold of the lady and run like a gazel through the hushed multitude towards the podium where the Governor and the emissaries from Damascus were seated, studying the reaction which their pronouncement had produced on the gathering with a feeling of relief and triumph. Their gaze now turned in the direction of the boy who was now heading towards them. He

jumped on the platform and with a look of expectancy and innocence he asked the person who had just read the proclamation: "Has my father arrived? Where is he now?" These abrupt questions, which were shot at the announcer in rapid succession, made him pucker his brows in wonder at the boldness of the child. In particular he was amazed at the tone in which the questions were put, a tone of self assurance and authority seldom to be heard from a child of such tender age. As if he had heard a command which called for an immediate response, he replied; "My lad, before I reply to your questions, just let me know who you are and who is your father, about whom you are enquiring."

As if the boy considered this enquiry a display of ignorance or impertinence, he raised his chin further and retorted: "Don't a you know my father? Are you not an Arab that you show ignorance about me and my family." Saying this he, with characteristic innocence turned his face to the vast multitude of Medinites thronged there and jesturing with his small hands and pointing in ther direction, he continued: "Ask any one of them, O stranger to this city, and they will tell you I am Fuzail, son of Abbas, Standard-bearer of my Lord Imam Hussain's army and his most beloved brother." With these words he turned towards the Governor of Medina who was observing with dumbfounded amazement the boldness of the child so characteristic of the family of Ali and his children. Nonchalantly addressing the Governor he said, "Why don't you tell this man who I am and who my father is? By God, why is he delaying in replying to my question?"

By this time the old lady accompanying this child had reached the dais. When he had loosened her hold on his hand and run towards the platform, she had quickened her pace apprehending that if the people who had assembled in the mosque rose to disperse, there might be a stampede with considerable danger of her charge being trampled under foot. When she saw the child reach the dais without any mishap, she was greatly relieved. Still she continued her advance at a brisk pace, apprehending that the child might be subjected to some kind of tortures by the sadistic Governor. On her way to the Mosque, she had heard the announcement about the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. On reaching the dais she mounted it and took hold of the child's hand. Turning to the emissary from

Damascus she said, "O harbinger of bad tidings, tell me when Husain and his sons and followers were butchered by the tyrant of Damascus and his henchmen, where was my son Abbas? Did he not shed the last drop of his blood in defending the Imam and his family? Where were my other sons Muhammad and Usman and Jaafar? How could Husain and his sons be butchered mercilessly with my four sons there to defend them?" These words were spoken by the lady in a loud, clear, ringing voice which could be heard far and wide in the stillness that had descended on that gathering. Her words had an electrifying effect on the congregation and an involuntary and spontaneous sigh of admiration escaped the lips of thousands.

The herald from Damascus regained his composure in the fraction of a minute and turning to the lady replied: "Did you not hear me proclaim that all the kith and kin of Hussain, his borthers, his sons, his nephews and his followers, were all put to the sword? What makes you, think that your sons were not amongst them? For your edification let me add that your sons, in particular Abbas, put up a fight the like of which has not been seen in this part of the world and which will be talked about for a long time to come, wherever and whenever deeds of bravery are admired and discussed by men."

Fatema Qalabiya or Ummul Baneen, as she was popularly known, heard these words in silence. For a moment she stared with glassy eyes as if she were dumbstruck. Her face became ashen pale. Her lips, which were parched dry, were moving as if to say something but no words escaped from them. She was staring hard as if she was seeing some scene in her mind's eye, a kaleidoscope, the meaning of which she could not piece together. She neither swooned nor uttered a cry. Her grandson Fuzail who was beside her, was looking up intently at her as if he too were struck by the evil tidings. He instinctively felt that his grandmother, in spite of her desperate attempt to control her surging feelings, was overcome by grief. Clutching her hands, he cried; "Grandmother, what has come over you? Why don't you say something? Why do you not tell this man that what he says cannot be true—that no man is born who can kill my father and uncles, the most brave, the most gallant, the most valiant of mankind?"

Ummul Baneen's reverie was broken by the child's urgent though innocent pleadings. She looked round to see that all eyes were rivetted on her and her grandson beside her. In a moment she decided that she should not do anything which might invoke the pity of the assemblage. She felt that she owed it to the memory of her brave sons not to say or do a thing which might be construed as weakness of the mother of one so fearless, bold and gallant as Abbas. She would rather fight a battle with the great feelings of anguish which were raging within her, feelings of sorrow and indescribable grief which only a mother can feel on hearing the news of death of her sons in the prime of their youth—not one son but four sons whom she had brought up with loving and tender care as the only hope and solace of her bleak life, the life of a widow.

Tightening her grip on the hand of Fuzail she turned away and slowly descended the dais. Her steps, which were firm and fast when she had ascended the platform a little while before, were now slow and heavy. She was walking as if every step required effort on her part. Her head was bowed and her gait was slow. Instead of holding the hand of the child in her firm grip, she had now kept it on his shoulder as if she needed to do so for support. All the eyes in the congregation were following the venerable lady as she and her grandson were trudging out of the Prophet's mosque. Many of them were wondering whither she was bound. Some of them, solicitous about her condition, even followed her, walking a respectable distance behind her. The assembly was now dispersing. Quite a few were rushing home to convey the evil tidings they had received to other members of their family and those of their friends and acquaintances who could not come to the Prophet's mosque.

Ummul Baneen, with Fuzail to support her, slowly made her way to Jannat-ul-Baqi, the graveyard where Fatima, the Prophet's daughter lay buried. As soon as she reached the grave of Hussain's mother, Ummul Baneen flung herself on it and, no longer able to control the feelings, which were surging in her heart she burst out; "My lady, I have come to offer you condolences on the martyrdom of your beloved son Hussain. I do not mourn my sons Abbas, Muhammad, Usman and Jaafar, because I had reared them from their childhood to regard Husain as their lord and master and to live for him and to die for him." With these words she cried her heart out to unburden her soul which was choked with grief. When she slightly

regained her composure she continued; "O my lady, my only consolation is that my beloved Abbas, and my other sons fought bravely to the last in defence of Husain. You from heaven must have seen them each dying valiantly as great sons of a great father." Fuzail, who stood crying beside her, tugged at her sleeves to say that quite a number of people were now gathered round them. She looked up to see through her tear-filled eyes that most of the people were weeping for her, sharing the sorrows of a mother whose all hopes for the future were shattered that day by the sad tidings of not one but four martyrdoms of her sons.

With a jerk Ummul Baneen straightened up as if somebody had reminded her of some duty which she had to perform. She remembered that Fatima Sughra, the beloved daughter of Imam Husain whom he had left behind in Medina was lying on her sick-bed. She felt remorse at not going over to her and consoling her. A thought crossed her mind that if some others reached her before her and conveyed the sad news of the carnage of Karbala and told her that her father, her brothers, uncles and cousins had all been put to the sword, she would succumb to the shock of it. She realised that her first and foremost duty was to rush to her bed-side and to gently break the news to her in the best manner she could, after explaining the events to the venerable Umme Salma, wife of the Prophet, who was looking after Fatema Sughra and tending to her in her illness. The high sense of duty, which her son Abbas had acquired from her in such large measure, put a new spirit in her grief-stricken frame, from which the sad tidings of that day had only a little while ago sapped all the strength. She once again took hold of the child's hand and, after casting a look around her, as if to convey to the people who were assembled there that, deep as her sorrow was, she was not oblivious of the call of her duty, she walked away briskly. Fuzail was greatly surprised to see that his grandmother, who only a few minutes before had become so benumbed with sorrow that she could hardly walk with heavy steps and needed to support herself by leaning on his young shoulders, was now rushing along, almost running, and dragging him in the process, as if some one had bekoned to her. He knew that any thought of a duty to be performed always electrified the step of that venerable old lady. In his childish imagination he wondered whether his father or his uncle, who he now knew were in heaven, had harkened to her

towards some task which needed her attention. He looked up at her with enquiring eyes, to find out why she was walking so briskly, so fast, but his question froze on his lips. He saw his grandmother staring steadfastly with glassy eyes from which tears were rolling down her wrinkled cheeks. For the first time he saw wrinkles on that face; for the first time he saw her hair gone grey.

When Ummul Baneen took the turning at the cross-roads, Fuzail knew where she was hastening. Young though he was, he knew that she was rushing towards the house of Imam Husain, where the Prophet's widow Umme Salma was staying with the ailing daughter of the Imam. When both of them reached the house, Ummul Baneen looked round to see that some ladies were standing at a little distance from the house,, discussing something. It did not require much imagination for her to ~~discuss~~ ^{surmise} that they were discussing how best to break the news to Fatema Sughra and Umme Salma. She was very much relieved to see that she was not too late in performing this delicate but painful duty of gently informing them about the news of the disaster that had befallen the family of the Prophet.

When the ladies of Medina saw Ummul Baneen, they hastened towards her and one of them conveyed to her what she had already imagined about the problem which was baffling them. She very gently thanked all the ladies for their solicitude and requested them not to visit Fatema Sughra's house as she apprehended that the sight of all of them visiting the house together, might administer a shock to her, which she, in her failing health, might not be able to bear. Many of the ladies with sympathy and tears offered her condolences on the death of her four sons, all in the prime of youth, whom she had lost in one day. This reminder of her colossal loss opened up the ghastly wounds in her heart which she had tried to repair with almost super-human control. The mention of her sons' names recalled to her the scene before this very house, in this very street, when one after the other they had come to bid her good-bye. She remembered how affectionately each of them had hugged her in the parting embrace and asked her to look after herself and to remember them in her daily prayers. She recalled how every day, on waking up from her sleep, she would wonder where they were and when they would return to bring back light and life into her drab and dreary world. But

~~were~~^{now} alas, those fond hopes ~~all~~^{were} dashed to the ground. For her there was nothing left but to pass her dismal days with the memories of her sons, from the days each one of them sat on her lap and asked her to recount the deeds of bravery of their valiant father, the prowess and feats of arms of their sire which had become almost legendary, how she had recounted to them, times out of number, about the devotion and attachment of their father to the holy Prophet and how she had been exhorting them to imbibe the same spirit and emulate his example, not only in the feats of arms but in his sense of duty and devotion by sparing nothing in the course of their duty towards their elder brothers Hasan and Husain whom she regarded with utmost reverence and loved with deepest affection.

All this passed before the mind's eye of Ummul Baneen in a matter of seconds. As soon as the thought crossed her mind that all that she had inculcated in her sons had not gone in vain and they had lived and died, true to her teachings, she felt a relief as if some soothing balm had been applied to her bleeding heart, as if her lacerated ^{soul} had been applied some balm. She regained her composure and brushed aside her tears. She profoundly thanked all the ladies who had offered her sympathies and requested them to visit the house of Imam Husain after some time to offer condolences to Umme Salma and Fatema Sughra after she had gently conveyed the sad tidings to them.

When Ummul Baneen entered the room of Fatima Sughra, she saw her restlessly tossing on her couch with Umme Salma, the venerable old widow of the Prophet, sitting with her hand on Sughra's forehead. Seeing her entering the room, Fatima Sughra sat up in her bed, partly out of respect for her grandmother, partly in anticipation of receiving some news from her. A look at the face of Ummul Baneen conveyed volumes to her. The rays of the setting sun were lighting up the tear-stained wrinkled face of Ummul Baneen and the grey hair that she had got that day. Fatema Sughra had been seeing her grandmother daily, the very picture of robust health and vitality. The sight of her, standing before her, aged and bent with the crushing blow that the news had dealt to her, made Sughra feel that her worst fears had come true. Not long ago, she had one night dreamt in the month of Muharram, precisely on the tenth night of that month, that the Prophet had come to her house and put his hand on her head

soothingly, much as was customary to do for orphans. She had seen the Prophet in her dream with his clothes soiled with dust and his beard smeared with blood. She had got up from her nightmare with a shriek. At that very moment she had seen her greatgrandmother, Umme Salma, getting up from her dream with shrieks. She too had dreamt seeing the Prophet in a similar condition, telling her that he had just returned from the plain of Karbala after seeing his beloved grandson Husain being massacred with his sons, brothers, nephews and faithful friends. Both of them had become painfully conscious of some terrible news reaching them.

Fatema Sughra's health had, since that night, taken a turn for the worse and she had almost become bed-ridden now. A second look at her grandmother's face convinced her that her worst forebodings had come true, that she was seeing in reality what the dream had prepared her for. Umme Salma, with the wisdom of her years, could very well imagine what news Ummul Baneen had come to break to them. There is no way that can be termed gentle in breaking news of such a stupendous disaster. She only exchanged one meaningful glance with Ummul Baneen and understood what had happened. But Fatema Sughra with great efforts cried out in agony of her soul; "Grandmother, for the sake of God tell me the truth. Is my father killed? Are my dear brothers Ali Akbar and Ali Asghar, my loving uncles, all killed? Is it true that I shall never be able to see them in this world?" Saying this she, for a moment, beseechingly looked into the eyes of Ummul Baneen. She tried to say something but no words escaped her parched lips; they only quivered speechlessly. But the big warm tears rolling down her cheeks, which were glistening in the rays of the setting sun, and the nod of her head, conveyed the reply to Fatima Sughra. The grief was too great for her frail body and afflicted mind to bear. With one gasp she fell unconscious on the bed. Umme Salma and Ummul Baneen for the moment forgot their own grief and turned towards Fatema Sughra lest she may also leave them to join her father and brothers and uncles in heaven. Now both these venerable ladies were concerned about this charge left with them and their thoughts turned towards the ladies of Imam Hussain's house who had accompanied him to Karbala. They both wondered where they were, what had befallen them, and when they would return to tell them about the events of that bleak day that had seen such gory events.

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The moon was almost setting, casting its dying rays on the waters of the rivulet Al Quma and the few tents that were pitched on its banks. Besides these tents, there were a few graves which were scattered over some distance, providing the only landscape which the lunar beams could light up dimly. The stillness of the night was almost suffocating. The only noise that could be heard for minutes around was the chirping of the night insects and the monotonous rippling of the waters of the stream. In the eerie atmosphere that was pervading the plain one could almost imagine that the waters of the rivulet were singing a dirge, recounting the mournful events of the day that had seen the death of those who lay buried in the nearby graves.

Suddenly there was a stir in one of the tents, as if somebody had been awakened from his sleep. The flap of the tent was lifted and an old man, walking with a bent back and supporting himself on a staff, came out of it followed by a young person who apparently was his valet or orderly. Slowly he advanced towards the other tents and, standing a few paces away, shouted for the inmates of the other tents to come out. Apparently the old man was speaking with a tone of authority as, hearing his voice, the other persons sleeping in the tents rushed out showing apparent concern for his safety and welfare. He seemed to be their leader or chieftain as they reverentially addressed him with bent heads. One of these persons, who perhaps was closer to him, a friend if not a blood relation, and quite advanced in age, came hurriedly to where the old man was standing and said, "O Jaber, what is the matter with you that you woke up so early before the break of dawn. May Allah bless you and your noble revered father, we all felt frightened by the thought that some illness had come to you or some pain had awakened you from your sleep. Pray tell us the cause of your perturbation, if it is not connected in any way with your health."

The old man was no other than Jaber bin Abdulla Ansari. He had, on hearing about the martyrdom of Imam Husain and his companions and the imprisonment and incarceration of the surviving members of his family, had hastened towards Karbala with his devoted friends and followers. He had heard that the bodies of the martyrs of Karbala were left without any burial. He recalled on hearing this that

long ago the Prophet of Islam had told him that, after the martyrdom of his beloved grandson Husain, he would participate in the duty of burying the heads of the martyrs on the banks of Al Quma, a tributary of the Euphrates. On reaching Karbala he saw that the Bani Asad, who were having their nomadic camps some distance away from Karbala, had covered the bodies with sand to protect them from the ravages but no proper burial had been given to the martyrs. Jaber Ibne Abdulla Ansari, with the help of his friends prepared the graves of the martyrs. He buried Imam Husain and next to his grave he put the bodies of his two beloved sons, Ali Akbar and Ali Asghar. He put the body of Habib Ibne Mazahir in a grave a little distance away from Imam Husain's. Perhaps in doing so he recalled that in life Habib Ibne Mazahir used to stand behind Imam Husain, with his arms folded and head reverentially bent. He imagined that even in death Habib might like to stand as a sentry near the grave of his Imam and beloved master. He had tried to shift the body of Abbas to the area where the other graves were prepared but he did not do so feeling somewhat baffled as to why Imam Husain had left the body by the side of the river instead of bringing it over to where the other bodies lay. He was sure that there must be some good reason for it, some real purpose behind it. He wondered whether Imam Husain had left the body of Abbas near the river to bring home some special association of his martyrdom with the flowing waters of the river. He even imagined that when he was thinking of dis-intering the body of Abbas for shifting it nearer to the graves of the other martyrs, the waters of the stream were raising a murmur of protest as if wanting him to be buried there as a reminder of some significant role his martyrdom had on the bank of the river. He then prepared Abbas's grave where he lay interred.

Jaber Ibn Abdulla Ansari had to scour a wide area to trace the graves of some of the martyrs. He found the bodies of Aun and Hur buried quite a distance away from the main field of battle. When he asked the men of Bani Asad tribe the reason for Hur being buried so far away from the battle-field, one of their elders replied that, as in case of all the other martyrs, Imam Hussain had himself brought the body of Hur to the mortuary from the place where he had fallen and placed it there with his own hands. However, the old man told him, he had heard from some of the soldiers of Yazid's army that, when the battle was over

and it was decided by Amr Ibn Saad, Commander of the forces of Yazid, that all the martyrs' bodies should be trampled under the hoofs of horses, the soldiers who were under the command of Hur had protested vehemently and, almost in a state of revolt, warned him that, if any action was taken to despoil or desecrate the body of Hur, they would, one and all, fight to the last. According to the old man, this had deterred Amr Ibne Saad who fearing a mutiny in his army, had asked these rebellious soldiers of Hur's battalion to bury his corpse with full military honours. The soldiers who were under Hur's command had taken away his body for burial a good distance away so that even his grave could not be ravaged by the predators. Seeing this boldness on the part of Hur's soldiers in rescuing his dead body from depredation, many other soldiers, who had any relationship, even remote, with any of the followers of the Imam, came forward to claim the dead bodies of their relations so as to save them from being ravaged and trampled under the hoofs of the chargers. Even the hard-hearted Shimr had the brazen-facedness to say that, according to Arab custom, he would claim protection for the dead bodies of Abbas and his three brothers who were distantly related to him through their mother, lest he may incur the contempt of his contemporaries and colleagues for disregarding the ties of blood and not protecting the corpses of his blood relations.

When Jaber Ibn Abdulla heard this story, he wept bitterly asking whether there was not a soul amongst the hordes of Yazid on that day to say that Husein was the grandson, the most beloved child, of the Prophet, and he deserved their respect, if not in life, at least in death, on account of his ties of blood with the Prophet whom they claimed to revere as the last messenger of God! Could not any of them show respect for the relationship of Hussain with the Prophet when they were vying with one another in saving the corpses of even their distant kindred from despoiling!

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
Jaber Ibn Abdulla Ansari explained to his friends and companions that the reason why he had awakened them so early that morning was that in his dream he had seen the Holy Prophet who had told him that the captives' caravan, comprising Ali Zainal Abedeen, his infant son

Muhammad, Al Bakir, Hussain's sisters Zainab and Umme Kulsum and other ladies of the Prophet's family were to reach Karbala that morning. The Prophet had asked him to go forward to greet them and to convey to them his Salaams and condolences. He told his friends that he had awakened after this and he wanted them to accompany him so that they could go forward to receive the caravan and play hosts to the family of the Prophet.

By this time the first streak of dawn was visible on the eastern horizon. One of the entourage of Jabir recited the call to prayers and all of them offered their morning prayers and thanked Almighty Allah for giving them the opportunity of being not only the first pilgrims at the graves of the martyrs of Karbala, but also the first ones to greet the family of the Prophet on their return visit to the land, rendered sacred by the holy blood of the martyrs.

No sooner they had finished the prayers than they saw a cloud of dust rising in the distant horizon, indicating the approach of a caravan. Jaber and his friends rode their mounts to receive and welcome the Prophet's family. As soon as they were at a hailing distance, they got down from their steeds and, with profound respect, offered their salutations to Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen. Jaber Ibn Abdullah Ansari went over to the Imam and, holding the bridle of his horse, respectfully led him towards his camp on the banks of the river with the rest of the caravan following them. He told the Imam about the purpose of his visit to Karbala, what he had seen and heard during his halt there, and what he had done. He also respectfully enquired from Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen about the treatment meted out to him and the ladies of the Prophet's family. When this question was put to him, the Imam wept silently for quite some time and then softly replied; "O Jaber, it is a story of sufferings which will be written in blood and tears for future generations to read! What sufferings shall I recount to you which we endured after the great tragedy here? Our sufferings defy description."

When the ladies of Imam Husain's family saw the graves of their dear ones, they fell one by one from their camels, overcome by grief and sorrow. Each one rushed towards the grave of her son, brother, father or



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It required great efforts on Zainab's part to convince Umme Rabab that Imam Husain would have liked her to accompany the others to Medina. She at last succeeded and made her mount her camel. The caravan proceeded with Bashir Ibn Jazlam leading the procession, with a black banner in his hand and a black shawl round his neck to indicate that the mourners were bound on their homeward journey. Each lady was casting a longing, lingering look behind to see the graves of her beloved son, brother, nephew or husband under the baking sun of Nainevah.

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Medina on their ill-fated journey. Few of the ladies on this day had any children in their arms or by their side. There were no youths riding beside them with airs of hope and confidence, beaming with vivacity, radiance and the joy of life. Instead the veiled faces of ladies bore deep marks of sorrow, wrinkles and furrows which depicted sufferings too deep for words, which no offering of condolences could alleviate, no expression of sympathy could mitigate.

Imam Ali Zainal Abedeen reverentially asked his aunt Zainab whether she wanted to go to her house with all the ladies to meet the large throng of sympathisers who were assembled there to condole the death of the martyrs. She, however, desired that she should first be taken to the tomb of the Prophet. Reaching the grave of the Prophet, she flung herself on it and, from a bundle which she was carrying, she took out the blood-stained garment of her brother which he was wearing at the time he was beheaded. She reverentially put it on the grave of her grandfather and, with one suppressed cry of anguish, she collapsed unconscious. The muffled cry she uttered expressed all the pent up emotions that were surging in her wounded and bleeding heart, much more than any words could have expressed.

The ladies of Bani Hashim, led by Ummul Baneen and Fatima Sugra had by now gathered round her and the other ladies of the Imam's family. Umme Salma was no longer with them as she survived for a few days only after receiving the news of the tragedy of Karbala. They all did their best to revive her. When she came to, she thanked all those who were profusely offering her, and the other ladies, their sympathies and condolences and mourning over their sufferings. Supported by Ummul Baneen, mother of Abbas, and Fatima Sugra she got up. She in her turn offered to Ummul Baneen her condolences on the death of her four brave sons in the defence of the Imam and the cause he stood for. She then picked up the blood stained shirt of Husain from the grave of the Prophet and, with faltering steps, walked over to the grave-yard nearby where lay buried her mother Fatima Zahra and her brother Imam Hasan Al Mujtaba. When she reached her mother's grave, she put the blood soaked garment of Imam Husain on it and, falling on the grave and clasping it with both hands, she cried: "Mother, your Zainab has come, come alone to give you the tidings of your son's martyrdom, of the ruination of your house." She continued after a while: "O mother, how can I convey

to you what indignities I have suffered, what insults I have endured, what brutalities I have been subjected to! Shall I show you the marks of the ropes that were tied so hard as to cut into my flesh?" Saying this she uncovered her hands where raw flesh was visible as a result of the cuts inflicted by the fetters tied on them during the days of her incarceration. She continued to moan: "O mother, do I have to show you what the tyrants' whips have done to our backs? Do I have to narrate to you what your beloved Husain and his sons and nephews and brothers, in the prime of their youth, suffered before their martyrdom? No, I know that you were with us in spirit during all our ordeals, even when my beloved Sakina used to cry with thirst or under the lashing of Shimr. You were there when we mourned and buried Sakina in her tiny grave in the prison of Damascus. My beloved mother, Zainab has fulfilled her appointed task by bringing back the captives' caravan to Medina. Now call me back to yourself, so that my weary body and soul may rest, may rest in peace which I have not known for a long, long time."

Zainab's recounting of sufferings and the outpouring of her heart, were bringing forth torrents of tears from the eyes of all who were near her on that day—much as their narration does even today, after more than 1300 years.

ANJUMAN-E GHILAMAN-E ASGHAR
DR. AHMED LANE, KHARADHAR,
KARACHI-2

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